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ABSTRACT

PAGAN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

IN MAINLINE CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS

by

Irene Grace Puckett La Torra

Pagan beliefs are increasingly common in mainline denominational churches. This dissertation examined the prevalence of pagan, including New Age and paranormal, beliefs in Episcopal, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches. Individuals who held both pagan and Christian beliefs were identified and interviewed to understand their sense of their own spiritual identity better.

The findings suggest that Episcopalians show significantly more New Age and paranormal beliefs than members of other denominations, followed by Lutherans, with Methodists and Presbyterians showing the fewest New Age or paranormal beliefs. These beliefs are inversely correlated with Christian belief. Social desirability did not play a role in either New Age/paranormal or orthodox Christian belief.

Two types of individuals with both high New Age/paranormal and orthodox Christian scores were identified: spiritual seekers and supernatural explainers. Spiritual seekers belonged to a variety of faiths serially over time; supernatural explainers maintained a Christian faith but added a parallel faith in psychic events. Freedom to choose beliefs and the ability to question were especially important to both groups. The importance of both catechesis and community in spiritual formation was explored.

Finally this study led to a reconceptualization of James E. Marcia's identity statuses. Marcia's two dimensions of exploration and commitment were replaced with

three dimensions of flexibility, commitment, and pervasiveness. In addition to the additional identity statuses described by Gregory A. Valde, Koen Luyckx et al., and Elisabetta Crocetti et al., a final eighth status, *integration,* was proposed to explain the results of this research.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

PAGAN CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL IDENTITY

IN MAINLINE CHRISTIAN DENOMINATIONS

presented by

Irene Grace Puckett La Torra

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Soli Deo gloria. To God be the glory.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Introduction

The student spoke with the authority that comes with adolescence: "I'm a Christian and I believe in reincarnation." This student was not an unchurched youth, but a teen in who had faithfully attended Sunday worship, had regularly participated in the church youth group, and had been consistently exposed to both scripture and creeds. She was adamant that she had experienced, and remembered, past lives, and she saw no conflict between reincarnation and her Christian beliefs.

Like this teen, more and more individuals hold both Christian and non-Christian spiritual beliefs. Christians live in an increasingly pluralistic world. Christians are now more likely to live, work, shop, and play with Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and Wiccans. Christians immersed in this theological milieu are tempted to incorporate non-Christian beliefs, particularly New Age and the paranormal, into their worldviews.

Not all of these theological systems and concepts are mutually compatible. Belief in a single bodily resurrection to eternal life is incompatible with a belief in reincarnation to life after life after life. Similarly, believing that the position of the stars at birth controls one's life is inconsistent with the belief that God controls one's life. Belief that God created people cannot be reconciled with the belief that humans are gods. Some beliefs are irreconcilable.

However, increasingly in culture and in churches, individuals simultaneously hold incompatible Christian and pagan beliefs. Christians who regularly read their horoscopes are not uncommon, as are Christians who believe in reincarnation (Orenstein 308;

Possamai, Bellamy, and Castle 16). Indeed, studies have consistently shown a pattern of Christian and paranormal beliefs across denominations (Bainbridge 389-90; Donahue 182; Orenstein 304; Possamai, Bellamy, and Castle 17-18). Irreconcilable beliefs are not limited to parishioners and congregants. For instance, within the Episcopal church clergy have held conflicting beliefs, including priests who also practiced Islam (Tu), Buddhism (Congar), and Wicca (Olsen). These trends speak to an increasing syncretism within many mainline denominations.

If pastors and teachers within Christian churches are going to respond to the creeping paganism within denominations, they need to understand the breadth and depth of the problem. Pastors need to know what pagan beliefs are held within their congregations, how common those beliefs are, and how individuals who hold both pagan and Christian beliefs construct a coherent sense of spiritual identity. Using this knowledge, pastors can respond appropriately and pastorally.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to examine the prevalence of pagan beliefs within mainline denominations and to understand the spiritual identities of individuals who hold both Christian and New Age or paranormal beliefs.

Research Questions

In order to respond to the increasing paganism within mainline churches, pastors need to understand the extent of the pagan beliefs held by parishioners and congregants. In addition, pastors must understand the thought processes of individuals who hold both pagan and Christian beliefs and how they meld these beliefs into a coherent spiritual identity. To this end, this study posed the following research questions.

Research Question #1

Do Christians in Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Baptist churches demonstrate statistical differences in the pagan beliefs they hold?

Research Question #2

What kinds of pagan beliefs do Christians in Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Lutheran churches hold?

Research Question #3

How do individuals reconcile incompatible Christian and pagan beliefs?

Research Question #4

How do individuals who hold both Christian and pagan beliefs create a cohesive sense of spiritual identity?

Definition of Terms

Mainline denominations include the Episcopal (TEC), Methodist (UMC), Lutheran (ECLA), Presbyterian (PCUSA), and Baptist (SBC) churches in the United States.

Within the context of this study, *pagan* refers to non-Christian spiritual or religious beliefs, including New Age, paranormal, and post-Christian beliefs. These beliefs include, but are not limited to, reincarnation, astrology, crystals, Eastern meditation, and the belief that each person is a god.

A *pagan Christian* is a person who believes in both pagan and Christian concepts at the same time.

Creeping paganism is the slow infiltration of pagan beliefs into mainline denominations, especially in terms of beliefs and practices.

Based on Wouter J. Hanegraaff's definition, *New Age* is defined as "a type of broad folk religion which appeals to many people at all levels of society" (289). However *New Age* is a difficult concept to define, and definitions within the existing literature vary greatly.

Paranormal describes supernatural beliefs that are outside of Christian beliefs and doctrines (Mencken 66), including belief in extrasensory perception (ESP), psychic powers, precognition, astrology, communication with the dead, and reincarnation (McKinnon 299).

Using the definition from Chris Kiesling et al., *spiritual identity* is "a persistent sense of self that addresses ultimate questions about the nature, purpose, and meaning of life, resulting in behaviors that are consonant with the individual's core values" (51). However, definitions of *identity* vary depending on the theoretical context.

Syncretism means simultaneously holding fundamental tenets from different faiths that are inconsistent or incompatible (Cook 73). John Connor defines Christian syncretism as "the combination of any belief or practice with Christian belief and/or practice which is objectively incompatible with Christian truth in the context of culture" (28). For instance, many New Age and paranormal beliefs are incompatible with Christian beliefs.

Ministry Intervention/Project

This project looked at creeping paganism in mainline denominations and grew out of an awareness that some teens and adults believed in both the resurrection and reincarnation. Members of mainline congregations completed surveys to identify the pervasiveness of these kinds of beliefs, and then a selected set of church members

participated in in-depth interviews to understand how they reconciled these beliefs within their spiritual identities.

This project measured pagan beliefs within Christian congregations. Members of Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Lutheran congregations were surveyed concerning their beliefs and practices, both Christian and pagan. Using a Web survey distributed through church e-mail lists, participants answered questions concerning their beliefs and behaviors, as well as demographic data. This data provided a measure of the extent of pagan beliefs within mainline congregations. Participants were also asked whether they would be willing to participate in more in-depth interviews.

In addition to the surveys, in-depth interviews were conducted with adults who held both Christian and pagan beliefs. These interviews examined not only their Christian and pagan beliefs but also how the individuals reconciled these disparate beliefs within their worldviews. This information provided a better understanding of how individuals integrate these beliefs in their lives.

Finally, these same participants were interviewed in order to understand their concept of their spiritual identity. These questions were designed to investigate each person's spiritual identity, including role salience and role flexibility (Kiesling et al. 52). This data provided insight into individuals' sense of spiritual identity and how their pagan and Christian beliefs influenced that identity.

Context

From the beginning, Christianity has often been lived out within a pagan context. The early churches in Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus were all surrounded by pagan cultures, and many of the conflicts of the early Church were triggered by attempts to

incorporate pagan ideas and ideals into the life and doctrine of the church. Most of the letters in the New Testament address, to some degree, exactly these kinds of challenges.

The church in this century is also surrounded by pagan cultures. Europe and much of the United States have become less explicitly Christian, with the result that churches now live within an often increasingly pagan context. As the church grows throughout the world, it will more and more come into contact with pagan cultures.

Mainline denominations in the United States also face pagan cultures around them—perhaps increasingly so. With the growth of interest in New Age practices and the paranormal, paganism's impact on the surrounding culture is mounting. Newspapers routinely carry astrological charts, and tarot readings are easily available. New Age philosophies permeate much of the media, from Disney movies to adult comedies. The parishioners and congregants of mainline denominations live in the midst of this paganism.

In general, survey respondents were older and better educated than the general population. A majority of the respondents were married women. And most associated were in some way with a mainline Protestant denominations.

Methodology

This study utilized an explanatory, mixed-method methodology, in which both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. A mixed methodology uses the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to understand and explain a phenomenon. This study used both surveys and in-depth interviews to gain insight into pagan Christian belief systems.

To understand the frequency and types of pagan Christians, participants completed a Web survey. Churches distributed the survey through their church e-mail lists. Participants were able to complete the survey anonymously. Survey questions examined their Christian and pagan beliefs and gathered demographic information. Individuals who wished to participate in more in-depth interviews could leave their contact information.

Following the survey, in-depth interviews provided further insight into individuals with both pagan and Christian beliefs. Seven individuals participated in semi-structured interviews based on their willingness to be interviewed and their demonstration of pagan Christian beliefs. The semi-structured interviews elicited further information about their beliefs and sense of identity. These interviews were recorded and analyzed to explore how pagan Christians reconcile their belief systems and how they form their sense of spiritual identity.

Participants

The population included Christians in mainline denominations in the United States. The sample for this study included 163 parishioners and congregants from the e-mail lists of preselected mainline denomination churches. Churches chosen for participation were representative of both the mainline denominations and of geographic regions within the United States. A subgroup of seven individuals who held both pagan and Christian beliefs participated in in-depth interviews.

Instrumentation

The quantitative portion of this study used four different instruments to gather data on Christian and pagan beliefs, demographics, and social desirability. A

demographic survey (DS) gathered basic demographic data about the respondents, including denomination and religious participation. The demographic survey was followed by the Short Christian Orthodoxy scale (SCO), which measured each individual's beliefs in basic Christian doctrines. This instrument was augmented with one further question concerning the Trinity. To assess the prevalence of pagan beliefs within mainline churches, questions from the Pew Forum's 2009 Religion and Public Life Survey were used to gather quantitative data about common pagan beliefs. These questions were augmented with one further question on tarot cards and Ouija boards in order to generate a measure of pagan beliefs (PB). In addition, the short form of the Social Desirability Scale-17 (SDS-17) was used to measure the impact of social desirability upon the other measures. Together these survey instruments addressed the first two research questions.

Since the second question attempted to discover further how individuals mentally organize both traditional and pagan beliefs, a qualitative measure was also used. For this question a pile sort was used. A pile sort is a qualitative technique in which respondents are asked to create their own groupings or cognitive mappings based on the sorting of a group of related terms. In the pile sort, respondents sorted a variety of spiritual concepts into groups. These groupings revealed their spiritual cognitive maps.

Finally, to gain further insight into the beliefs and worldviews of pagan Christians, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were done using the Spiritual Identity (SI) protocol. The SI protocol was used to gather further qualitative information. The SI protocol addressed the third and fourth research questions.

Variables

For this study the criterion variable was a measure of the pagan beliefs held by individuals. The predictor variables were the survey and interview questions and responses, including demographic questions and questions about Christian beliefs. Intervening variables included the desire to appear culturally relevant, the need to portray oneself as a good Christian, previous exposure to pagan beliefs, and personal and cultural heritage.

Data Collection

An online Web survey application, Qualtrics, collected the DS, SCO, PB, and SDS-17 data. The survey remained open over a period of two months in order to maximize participation. Qualtrics also stored the survey data in preparation for analysis.

Qualtrics also gathered the pile sort data. Qualtrics automatically directed respondents to the pile sort once they had completed the demographic, orthodoxy, pagan belief, and social desirability questions. The pile sort remained open over the same two months as the other survey instruments.

SI interviews occurred over a period of two months. Interviewees indicated whether they wanted to be interview by mail, e-mail, or phone. Digital recording ensured the accuracy of the phone interviews. Transcription into Dedoose preparated all SI interviews for further analysis.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the DS, SCO, PB, and SDS-17 data used SAS statistical software, as well as the R statistical application. Analyses identified the relationships among pagan beliefs, Christian beliefs, and demographic data, including gender, age, and

denomination, and ascertained whether pagan beliefs occurred more commonly in some populations than others within the church.

Analyses of pile sort data utilized Gephi. Examination of the data identified common groupings of similar terms by denomination. These groupings described the mental or cognitive schemas of how individuals understood the different terms.

Analysis of the SI interview data used the Dedoose Web application. Tags applied to the interviews identified keywords and ideas. Content analysis yielded important themes within the interview data in order to understand better participants' concepts of their spiritual identity and their mechanisms for reconciling their Christian and pagan beliefs. Comparison of the results from the qualitative and quantitative measures verified consistency across the different instruments.

Generalizability

This study focused on the prevalence of pagan beliefs in Christians within mainline denominations in the United States. While limited in scope to mainline denominations, other denominations may find the results applicable to their congregants and contexts as well.

The definition of *pagan* beliefs within this study was intentionally set quite narrowly to include only New Age and paranormal beliefs. One limitation of this study is the difficulty in defining even those terms: *New Age* and *paranormal* are notoriously difficult to define accurately and usefully. Explicitly excluded from this study were beliefs associated with other religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. Further research is necessary to identify whether the results of this study can be generalized to include the syncretistic incorporation of the beliefs of other religions.

Finally, the sample sizes in this study were small and may limit the generalizability of the findings to the greater population. Smaller samples increase the possibility that the results may be skewed in one direction and are, therefore, not representative of the entire population.

Theological Foundation

Any theological consideration of human identity must start with God. Scripture clearly communicates that God is holy: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God of hosts" the seraphim proclaim (Isa. 6:3, ESV). Holiness sets God apart, and is an integral part of who God is.

Similarly, God calls humanity to be holy, to be set apart: "Be holy, for I am holy," God challenges the Israelites (Lev. 11:44). God's people are to hold themselves apart, particularly from beliefs and cultures that fail to hold a godly worldview.

These pagan cultures and worldviews are apparent throughout the arc of biblical history. Pagan worldviews consistently encompass the following beliefs:

- The belief that the entire universe is "connected";
- The belief that change can be effected through these connections using divination, ritual, and magic;
- The belief that all that is necessary is knowledge of the existence and techniques for manipulating these connections; and,
- The belief that individuals are connected directly to the gods and may even become gods themselves.

These pagan beliefs were not consistent with the Isrealite understanding either of God or humanity. Because God's people were called to be holy and to hold themselves apart

from the surrounding cultures, these pagan worldviews were strictly prohibited, and efforts were made to root out pagan beliefs within the Israelite culture. This understanding of the dangers of pagan beliefs continues into the New Testament. The pastoral letters provide some of the most cogent guidance on both recognizing and responding to pagan influences within the early Christian communities.

Paul encouraged and exhorted Timothy at Ephesus:

> I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. (2 Tim. 4:1-4)

Timothy and the Ephesian church were struggling with pagan influences that threatened to undermine their doctrine and community. While the exact contents of the Ephesian myths are unclear, apparently they were additions to and deviations from the teaching and doctrines that the Ephesians had originally received (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Out of curiosity ("itching ears"), members of the Ephesian church were adding other teachers and beliefs beyond what they had received from the apostles.

Paul therefore gave Timothy clear guidance on how to respond to this threat (2 Tim. 4:2). These words echo Paul's earlier instructions: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Timothy's response needed to start with the Word. He needed to teach and preach Scripture. This preaching and teaching provided the firm foundation for their faith to grow. Those who wandered from Scripture needed reproof or correction. If they

continue in their waywardness, they needed to be rebuked and told to stop. Finally, they required exhortation to return to the word of God, abhorring the misguided teachers and their myths. Paul instructed Timothy to reprove and rebuke with patience and teaching in order to return the Christians in Ephesus to the truth.

Paul faced a similar problem in Corinth. The Corinthians were also surrounded by pagan theologies, which Paul described as "a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age" (1 Cor. 2:6), and they struggled to know what was the truth. Paul encouraged them to be wise:

> So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (1 Cor. 2:11b-13)

True wisdom comes from God and can only be recognized through the agency of God's Spirit.

Paul writes similarly to a number of the other early churches. To the Roman Christians, he wrote, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). To the church in Colossae, he wrote, "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col. 2:8). Throughout his letters, Paul is consistent. True wisdom is from God and is not to be found in the teachers, myths, and human traditions of the world.

Paul is not alone in his condemnation of worldly myths and theologies. For instance, John warns of false prophets and the spirit of the antichrist:

> Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 John 4:1-6)

John instructs his listeners to test the spirits and listen only to those that are from God. Peter also warns about worldly myths and the need to listen to the Holy Spirit:

> For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty ... And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Pet. 1:16, 19-21)

Scripture is permeated with warnings of the dangers of myths, human traditions, and false teachers. The message is clear: Christians are to avoid pagan beliefs and worldviews, hewing instead to God's wisdom as revealed by the Holy Spirit.

Overview

Chapter 2 reviews the literature associated with paganism, Christianity, and spiritual identity. Chapter 3 includes an in-depth discussion of the design and methodology of the study, including the sample, protocols, collection of data, and analysis. Chapter 4 addresses the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the conclusions garnered from the data, as well the practical applications and the indications for future studies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Introduction

Pagan beliefs are increasingly common among Christians. Christians can be found who also believe in reincarnation, astrology, and a variety of other New Age and paranormal phenomena. Individuals are melding together these different religious beliefs to create new spiritual identities.

The purpose of this research was to examine the prevalence of pagan beliefs within mainline denominations and to understand the spiritual identities of individuals who hold both Christian and New Age or paranormal beliefs. Research exists on New Age and paranormal beliefs, as well as on the topics of self and identity, particularly spiritual identity.

Pagan Christians

Any study of pagan beliefs must first define what *pagan* means. Researchers struggle to define the term *pagan*, and many researchers, particularly researchers of paranormal beliefs, skip the definition entirely and proceed directly to measurement (e.g., Aarnio and Lindeman; Auton, Pope, and Seeger; Donahue; Foster, Smith, and Stovin; Francis, Williams, and Robbins, "Personality"; Groth-Marnat and Pegden; Houtman, Aupers, and Heelas; McKinnon; Orenstein; Richman and Bell; Robbins, Francis, and Williams; Wierzbicki). Failing to define the term *pagan* is dangerous and increases the risk of misalignment between the concept and its measurement (Kristensen 14; Lawrence, "Moving On from the Paranormal Belief Scale" 132; Lindeman and Aarnio 732).

For instance, *paranormal* has been defined in a number of different ways. Anne Finlayson Smith and Janette Graetz Simmonds describe the paranormal as being anything beyond the normal, going on to say that the paranormal includes "any phenomenon which appears to be unexplained by current scientific theories" (332). Tony R. Lawrence's definition of paranormal is similar ("Moving On from the Paranormal Belief Scale" 132). Oney D. Fitzpatrick and Scott L. Shook base their definition on Jerome J. Tobacyk ("What Is the Correct Dimensionality") and use a threefold criteria to define paranormal beliefs: (1) They cannot be explained by current science; (2) they can only be explained by science if major revisions are made to basic scientific principles; and, (3) they are incompatible with "normative perceptions, beliefs, and expectations about reality" (316). Michael P. Kelley bases his definition on that of Marjaana Lindeman and Kia Aarnio and includes telepathy, clairvoyance, psychokinesis, precognition, ESP, mental or spiritual healing, and "shamanic" or "siddhi" powers (302). Alan Orenstein points out that paranormal beliefs are "profoundly religious in nature" (309).

F. Carson Mencken uses a cultural definition of paranormal, recognizing that by many definitions conventional Christian beliefs would be considered paranormal. To avoid the inclusion of Christian beliefs in the definition of paranormal, Mencken defines paranormal as "any supernatural belief that is outside of the beliefs and doctrines of the dominant belief system of a culture" (66). This definition is highly relativistic and based on the culture of reference, so much so that Christian beliefs could be considered paranormal in one culture yet not paranormal in another.

Lindeman and Aarnio use a very different approach to define paranormal. Borrowing the concept of ontological confusion from children's cognitive development,

they define paranormal beliefs as "category mistakes where the core attributes of mental, physical, and biological entities and processes are confused with each other" (734). Using this definition, paranormal beliefs involve attaching incorrect attributes to an object, for instance believing that a lightning strike had a *purpose*. Using Lindeman and Aarnio's definition, many Christian activities could be considered to be incorrect attributions and, therefore, paranormal as well.

Researchers have identified a number of factors associated with paranormal beliefs, unfortunately with little consensus on what those factors are. For instance, several studies have identified two factors, although not necessarily the same factors. Fitzpatrick and Shook identified factors of traditional religious beliefs and paranormal beliefs, where paranormal beliefs included psi, witchcraft, spiritualism, life forms, and precognition (322). Rense Lange, H. J. Irwin, and James Houran discovered two factors, similar to Fitzpatrick and Shook's, which they identify as New Age philosophy and traditional paranormal beliefs (148). Tony Glendinning and Steve Bruce isolated factors of divination and holistic medicine (408). Lawrence ("How Many Factors") and Steve E. Hartman (134) both identified four factors, including traditional religious beliefs, psi beliefs, witchcraft, and superstition. Karl Kani, Tony R. Lawrence, and Chris A. Roe also reported four factors. Kelley detected five factors: New Age philosophy, traditional religious beliefs, extraordinary life forms, psi, and superstitions (306). Pio de Cicco and Tony R. Lawrence describe five factors, although they point out that all of their models fall short of being statistically significant. Jerome J. Tobacyk and Gary Milford identify seven factors, including traditional religious beliefs, psi beliefs, witchcraft, superstition, spiritualism, precognition, and extraordinary life forms (1030-31). Adrian Thomas and

Jerome J. Tobacyk report that a mixed model of both oblique and orthogonal factors most accurately describes the structure of paranormal beliefs, although they are undecided on exactly how many factors should be included. Clearly, experts have not reached a consensus on the number of factors that comprise paranormal beliefs, nor have they decided whether New Age beliefs are a subset of paranormal beliefs or an entirely different concept.

Not surprisingly, *New Age* has a variety of definitions as well. Sergej Flere and Andrej Kirbiš define New Age in terms of three indicators: "the awakening of the inner spiritual self, the unified nature of the universe in terms of spiritual energy, and the immanence of a new era of spiritual awakening" ("New Age Is Not Inimical" 179). In a separate article, they build on the work of Lavričand describe the New Age in terms of self-potential, millenarianism, and holism ("New Age, Religiosity" 162). Pehr Granqvist and Berit Hagekull prefer to use an analogy in which New Age beliefs are "a smorgasboard [sic] with various blends of ingredients that the individual is free to choose from" (530). These choices include Eastern thinking, astrology, Jungian psychology, the animate cosmos, millennialism, occult, parapsychological phenomena, UFOs, yoga, rebirthing, encounter groups, crystals, and positive affirmations. Granqvist and Hagekull identify some key words that underlay these concepts, including intuition, holism, religious syncretism, immanence, and epistemological subjectivism and relativism (530).

Hanegraaff takes a different approach, and defines New Age thinking as "a pervasive pattern of implicit or explicit culture criticism" (291). He goes on to elaborate that New Age belief is generally opposed to dualism and reductionism, particularly within the context of Western culture. This Western culture is often expressed in terms of

"dogmatic, institutionalized Christianity on the one hand, and an over-rationalist science on the other" (292). Instead, New Age believers propose a "universal spirituality based upon the primacy of personal inner experience" (292), the knowledge of which has been passed down through secret traditions. Hanegraaff describes New Age religion in terms of the manipulation of symbolic systems:

> The crucial characteristic of New Age religion ... is that it consists of a complex of spiritualities which are no longer embedded in any religion—as was the case with all spiritualities from the past—but directly in secular culture itself. All manifestations of New Age religion, without exception, are based upon what I have called an "individual manipulation of existing symbolic systems." In this way, new syntheses are continually being created, providing the very thing which religion has always provided: the possibility for ritually maintaining contact with a more general meta-empirical framework of meaning, in terms of which people give sense to their experiences in daily life. (303-04)

This process, he argues, is the ultimate secularization of religion (305).

Dick Houtman and Stef Aupers include New Age beliefs within the context of post-Christian spirituality, which they define as "a basically romanticist conception of the self that is intrinsically connected to an immanent conception of the sacred" (307). They add, "New Agers believe that working on the self raises consciousness about the true, divine nature of the world as a whole" (307). Because of this emphasis on the self, Houtman and Aupers argue that religion is being replaced by spirituality (315).

Gordon R. Lewis uses a similar definition of the New Age movement that centers on individual and societal transformation. He defines it as "a spiritual, social and political attempt to transform individuals and society through mystical experience of alleged oneness with the energy of the cosmos and occult techniques for ... inaugurating a new era of global peace" (434-35). Furthermore, Lewis points to elements of truth within New

Age beliefs, including the understanding that "there is more to life than meets the eye" and the existence of life after death (436).

In spite of the broadness of these definitions, researchers have found a fairly consistent set of beliefs. Granqvist and Hagekull state that most New Age believers perceive themselves as seekers rather than as dogmatic:

> One implication is that the typical new ager's philosophy of life will be far less unique than he or she might believe it to be and that it generally conforms neatly to an underlying system of thought and behaviors that is often hidden behind the seeming diversity of the new age movement. In practice, this means that most new age characteristics are assembled within the same individual, including the self-evaluation of being an "open seeker" and the unfavorable evaluation of monotheistic religions as being "dogmatic." (540)

In other words, New Age believers appear to be more alike than they are different.

Many of these definitions of *paranormal* and *New Age* can also apply to religious, including Christian, phenomena (Lawrence, "Moving On from the Paranormal Belief Scale" 132). Granqvist and Hagekull comment, "[I]t should be obvious from the above characterization that the new age movement bears striking resemblances to religion" (530). According to these definitions, Christianity and the New Age may be considered related concepts.

For the purpose of this study, *pagan* was defined as non-Christian spiritual or religious beliefs. While this definition includes other religions, including Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism, for the purposes of this study, only New Age and paranormal beliefs were examined.

Measures of Paganism

A considerable body of literature investigates pagan beliefs across continents and cultures. Relationships between paganism and a number of different demographic

variables have been identified. These characteristics include age, gender, education, income, location, and denomination.

Research consistently shows a relationship between age and paranormal or New Age beliefs. In general, paranormal and New Age beliefs drop with age (Baker and Draper 418; Emmons and Sobal 324; Glendinning and Bruce 405; Glendinning 592; Mencken, Bader, and Stark 203; Mencken 77; Orenstein 308; Pew Forum 8; Possamai, Bellamy, and Castle 20). Exceptions to this pattern included Michael J. Donahue, who reported that age is mostly uncorrelated with the paranormal (180), and Robert Wuthnow, who detected no relationship between age and paranormal beliefs (159). These results indicate that younger individuals will generally be more inclined to hold New Age and paranormal beliefs, while older individuals will be less so.

Gender follows a similar pattern. Most studies have indicated that women consistently hold more paranormal and New Age beliefs than men (Auton, Pope, and Seeger 716; Baker and Draper 418; Foster, Smith, and Stovin; Glendinning and Bruce 404; Kelley 310; Mencken, Bader, and Stark 203; Mencken 77; Possamai, Bellamy, and Castle 20; Rice 101; Wuthnow 160). Indeed Orenstein states that gender is the most important demographic variable (308). Aarnio and Lindeman posit that this effect is due to women being more intuitive and less analytical, two tendencies that are generally associated with increased paranormal belief (6). Of all the studies that examined gender, only three reported differing results. Kristoffer B. Kristensen determined that women score higher than men on a scale of traditional religious beliefs, but that all other scales, including measurements of paranormal beliefs, show no gender effects. Like Kristensen,

Donahue (180) and Michael Wierzbicki (492) also detected no relationship between gender and paranormal or New Age beliefs.

Education shows a pattern similar to age and gender. Paranormal and New Age beliefs correlate negatively with education (Baker and Draper 418; Donahue 182; Fitzpatrick and Shook 324; Mencken 77; Richman and Bell 202; Wuthnow 160). In other words, the more education individuals receive, the less likely they are to hold paranormal or New Age beliefs. A handful of studies disagree with these results. Two studies reported no relationship between education and paranormal or New Age beliefs (Mencken, Bader, and Stark 203; Glendinning 586), while two other studies detected a positive relationship between pagan beliefs and education (Glendinning and Bruce 405; Rice 101). Given the number of studies on this topic, education is likely negatively correlated with paranormal and New Age beliefs.

Two studies considered geographic location. Joseph O. Baker and Scott Draper determined that United States southerners are less likely to hold New Age or paranormal beliefs (418). Donahue reported paranormal beliefs lowest in the East South Central region of the United States and highest in the Mid-Atlantic (180). Donahue theorizes that the increased rates of paranormal beliefs in the Mid-Atlantic may be related to increased urbanization. However, the decreased rates of paranormal beliefs in the south may be related to increased numbers of orthodox Christian believers who reside there. Furthermore, location may also reflect both political and denominational differences, rendering it less predictive overall.

Two studies examined the relationship between income and paranormal or New Age beliefs. While F. Carson Mencken, Christopher D. Bader, and Rodney Stark detected

a negative correlation between these beliefs and income (201), Tom W. Rice discovered no relationship at all (101). Between these two studies, the results should be considered inconclusive until further research can be done.

Only one study looked at the relationship between political orientation and paranormal beliefs. The Pew Forum's 2009 Religion and Public Life Survey reported that paranormal beliefs are more common in liberals than conservatives (8). While other students have not replicated this finding, the size of the sample in this survey gives the result some power.

An individual's denominational affiliation has also been shown to have a relationship with paranormal belief. Researchers have consistently demonstrated that paranormal beliefs tend to be high among Catholics (Emmons and Sobal 305; Baker and Draper 419; Mencken, Bader, and Stark 201; Possamai, Bellamy, and Castle 17), with Adam Possamai, John Bellamy, and Keith Castle arguing that the Catholic belief system, with its emphasis on magical elements, for instance angels and saints, may leave Catholics especially prone to New Age beliefs (24-25). Mainline Protestants also tend towards increased paranormal beliefs (Baker and Draper 419; Donahue 180), although Charles F. Emmons and Jeff Sobal demonstrated that Episcopalians report unexpectedly low paranormal beliefs while Lutherans report unexpectedly high beliefs (305). Possamai, Bellamy, and Castle also discovered Lutherans to have high New Age beliefs, but unlike Emmons and Sobal, their research detected similar numbers for Anglicans as well (17, 19). Baptists (Possamai, Bellamy, and Castle 17) and evangelicals (Baker and Draper 419) consistently demonstrate very low paranormal beliefs.

Evangelical orientation within denominational affiliation can also impact an individual's belief in the paranormal. Mencken (79) and Mencken, Bader, and Stark (200) discovered that evangelicals were less like to hold paranormal beliefs. The Pew Forum's 2009 Religion and Public Life Survey demonstrated similar results (5).

The relationship between religious beliefs and paranormal beliefs is more complicated. Some researchers have reported a correlation between paranormal beliefs and Christian beliefs (e.g., Possamai, Bellamy, and Castle 24; Glendinning and Bruce 404; Flere and Kirbiš, "New Age, Religiosity" 166; Granqvist et al. 596; Francis, Williams, and Robbins, "Christianity" 342). Some researchers have failed to uncover a correlation, particularly with faith maturity (Donahue 183). Still other research indicates that paranormal beliefs diminish as Christian beliefs increase (Bainbridge 386; Emmons and Sobal 307; Glendinning 592). Nonreligious individuals generally do not hold paranormal beliefs (Orenstein 305). Given these results, researchers do not agree about the relationship between Christian and paranormal beliefs.

Orenstein proposes that the way to reconcile this contradiction is to look at religious participation in addition to religious beliefs. When Orenstein added church participation into the equation, he discovered a curvilinear relationship. Religious individuals are more likely to hold paranormal beliefs but only if they do not regularly attend church (308). As church attendance increases, paranormal beliefs decrease. A number of researchers have replicated these results, including Andrew M. McKinnon (302), Glendinning (589, 592), Mencken (79), Mencken, Bader, and Stark (201), and the Pew Forum's 2009 Religion and Public Life Survey (8).

Baker and Draper demonstrated that religious exclusivity influences paranormal beliefs. Individuals who value an "open, nonexclusive" style of believing are more likely to engage in paranormal belief (422). Similarly, increased religious exclusivity is correlated with reduced paranormal beliefs.

Other studies have identified different correlations. Aarnio and Lindeman reported that individuals who hold paranormal beliefs have more mystical experiences (6). In addition they discovered that, unlike skeptics, believers in the paranormal are more likely to have other people with whom they have close relationships who also hold paranormal beliefs. Aarnio and Lindeman reported that paranormal believers had experienced more negative life events than those who did not hold paranormal beliefs (6). Donahue discovered that paranormal believers are more likely to say that they believe in items related to the "social gospel" (181), while T. L. Brink, in a study of girls in a Catholic school, identified marginalized girls as more likely to hold paranormal beliefs (84).

Some researchers have reported that attachment also has an impact on an individual's belief in the paranormal. For instance, Granqvist et al. discovered that individuals whose parents are rated as insensitive are more likely to hold New Age beliefs (597). Similarly, insecure attachment is associated with increased belief in the New Age (Granqvist and Hagekull 536). Attachment to one's parents appears to have an impact on personal beliefs, particularly surrounding the New Age and the paranormal.

A number of researchers have examined the relationship between thinking style and New Age or paranormal beliefs. For instance, Aarnio and Lindeman reported that believers in the paranormal are more likely to exhibit intuitive thinking (6). Similarly,

Granqvist and Hagekull discovered that New Age believers are associated with an emotionally based approach to religion (538).

Research into the relationship between critical thinking and paranormal beliefs has been inconclusive. Wierzbicki detected that paranormal believers make more reasoning errors than skeptics when faced with problems "having para-psychological content" (493) or problems requiring reasoning concerning the validity of hypotheses. In contrast to Wierzbicki, Chris A. Roe reports no differences in critical thinking among believers in the paranormal (93). Robin K. and David L. Morgan did discover that traditional religious beliefs, spirituality, and superstition, as measured by the Revised Paranormal Belief Scale, are negatively correlated with critical thinking. Similarly Christa L. Foster, Matthew D. Smith, and Gordon Stovin detected no relationship between intellectual ability and a reduction in belief in the paranormal.

Rather than looking at critical thinking, Granqvist et al. looked at disorganization. They discovered that paranormal believers are more likely to be disorganized and preoccupied (598). They also ascertained that paranormal believers have "a propensity to enter into dissociative-absorbing mental states, where the individual's attentional processes are temporarily broken down, resulting in a mental state shift" (598). These differences in thinking may have a negative impact an individual's ability to think rationally about pagan beliefs.

In terms of emotional processing, Aarnio and Lindeman discovered that those who hold paranormal beliefs are less emotionally stable (6). Francis, Williams, and Robbins reproted that paranormal believers are more likely to exhibit psychoticism, as measured by the Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire ("Christianity" 342;

"Personality" 36). Similarly Kelley discovered increased indications of schizotypy, in which "cognitive and perceptual distortions analogous to delusions and hallucinations, disorganized thought and behavior, and interpersonal deficits and social isolation" (311) occur. Heather R. Auton, Jacqueline Pope, and Gus Seeger failed to detect any signs of psychopathology among individuals who hold paranormal beliefs (718).

Differences have also been reported in measures of paranormal beliefs and locus of control. Gary Groth-Marnat and Julie-Ann Pegden discovered that college students who are paranormal believers are more likely to have an external locus of control (294). In contrast, college students who hold superstitious beliefs are more likely to have an internal locus of control. Robert W. Newby and Jessica Boyette Davis detected results similar to Groth-Marnat and Pegden, with paranormal beliefs associated with an external locus of control (1264). Finally, Jeffrey Rudski also found that superstitious beliefs are associated with an increased illusion of control (311). These results seem to indicate that paranormal believers experience a world in which much is out of their control, and superstitious believers experience a world that is within their control, often through the mechanism of superstitious belief.

Research indicates that sensation seeking is unrelated to paranormal beliefs in college students (Groth-Marnat and Pegden 294). Rudski detected no relationship between optimism and superstition (313), while Mandy Robbins, Leslie J. Francis, and Emyr Williams discovered that paranormal believers are more "tough-minded, non-socially confirming" (92). Perhaps of particular importance for this study was Roe's finding that paranormal believers have increased cognitive dissonance (93). Finally, no

relationship was identified between paranormal beliefs and identity achievement in college students (Fitzpatrick and Shook 324).

Pagan Christian Belief Theories

Based on the available data, researchers have proposed a number of different theories. However, many of the available theories are largely incompatible. Presently these theories include the single worldview theory, the small step theory, the curvilinear belief theory, the separate spheres theory, the safety net theory, the compensation theory, the marginalization theory, and the compatibility theory.

Single worldview theory. One of the simplest theories is that Christian and pagan beliefs form a single worldview. In this theory both pagan and Christian beliefs are seen as similar, in that they are both dealing with supernatural phenomena. Proponents of this theory include Flere and Kirbiš ("New Age Is Not Inimical" 183; "New Age, Religiosity" 167) and Tobacyk ("Final Thoughts"). Indeed for Tobacyk beliefs are on a continuum, with science on one end and religion and paranormal beliefs on the other. However, further research by Richard N. Williams, Carl B. Taylor, and Wayne J. Hintze failed to detect support for this continuum and discovered instead that paranormal beliefs depended on whether an individual's belief is intrinsic, extrinsic, or nonreligious (355-58). Kristensen's results also call into question the single sphere theory. His findings seemed to indicate a continuum with religion on one end and science and astrology at the other (67-68). The single worldview theory also does not account for the differences in pagan beliefs found between nominal and committed Christians.

Small step theory. Some researchers argue instead for a small step theory. In this theory a person begins with Christian beliefs and, through a series of small steps,

incorporates more and more pagan beliefs into his or her worldview. Dick Houtman, Stef Aupers, and Paul Heelas argue that these small steps happen as secularization increases and Christianity declines (177). Houtman and Aupers describe this process as detraditionalization:

> What we are witnessing today is not so much a disappearance of religion, but rather a relocation of the sacred. Gradually losing its transcendent character, the sacred becomes more and more conceived of as immanent and residing in the deeper layers of the self. At least in many places, religion is giving way to spirituality. (315)

Heelas and Houtman reach a similar conclusion (94). For Houtman and Aupers, pagan beliefs are incorporated into one's worldview one small step at a time. However, this theory does not explain some of the demographics, including differences in gender and thinking styles.

Curvilinear belief theory. As mentioned earlier, some researchers propose a curvilinear relationship between pagan and Christian beliefs. In this theory pagan beliefs are unlikely in nonbelievers, increase as Christian belief increases, but then diminish again with increased church participation. Researchers who hold this theory include Baker and Draper (422) and William S. Bainbridge (390-93). In the curvilinear belief theory, two belief systems share common beliefs. Bainbridge writes that these beliefs are "based in a shared belief in the existence of transcendent entities such as the human soul or spirit that can contact a supernatural world through prayer or meditation" (392). In essence two competing cultures share very similar yet different beliefs:

> This study has revealed a cultural continuity between religion and the New Age, probably based in a shared, fundamental assumption that spiritual realities exist outside the mundane boundaries of the material world. Thus, standard churches may inadvertently and inescapably encourage the emergence of competitors who fall outside their own traditions. (393)

The curvilinear belief theory attempts to address the findings that paranormal beliefs differ depending on the degree of religious participation.

Separate spheres. In contrast to the previous theories, some researchers propose that pagan and Christian beliefs inhabit entirely different belief spheres. No overlap between Christian and pagan beliefs exists in this theory. Researchers who support this theory include Francis, Williams, and Robbins ("Christianity" 342; "Personality" 37) and Kristensen (91). Francis, Williams, and Robbins go on to clarify that in this theory pagan beliefs can be seen as complementary to Christian beliefs ("Christianity" 342). Individuals may hold both pagan and Christian beliefs and not perceive any overlap or conflict between their belief systems.

Interestingly Baker and Draper argue that both the small step theory and the separate spheres theory are only partial representations of the truth (422). They find that for those who hold exclusivist beliefs, pagan and Christian beliefs occupy two separate belief systems or worldviews in line with the separate spheres theory. For those who do not hold exclusive beliefs, the small step theory holds.

Safety net. Several researchers propose a *safety net* theory. In this theory, individuals hold both Christian and pagan beliefs as a sort of safety net—if one set of beliefs does not work, perhaps the other will. Supporters of this theory include Brink (83), Fitzpatrick and Shook (326), and Rudski (312). Brink likens this approach to the man who wears both suspenders and a belt, just in case. According to Rudski the safety net theory may be a way for individuals to deal with uncertainty, particularly in regards to superstitions (312).

Desacralization. Thomas Molnar provides a different explanation. According to Molnar, the increased emphasis on rationality over myth and symbol has "desacralized" Christianity (44). Christians have become increasing rational and have lost their sense of wonder and awe. This desacralization leaves open the door for pagan influences. Indeed, pagan beliefs may be added to the basic rational Christian tenets in an effort to reintroduce myth and symbol to a largely sterile faith. Molnar writes, "[T]he pagan worldview persists behind the Christian worldview and [under] favorable circumstances, among which the most important is the fading of Christian truth as symbolized by myth,... manifest[s] itself with a renewed vigor" (60). Pagan beliefs gain power when Christian belief in the supernatural diminishes (78). Molnar describes the increase in pagan beliefs in Christianity, saying, "In Christianity it is belief in the supernatural that keeps the element of the sacred alive and publicly active. Its fatigue, its listlessness or indifference, opens the way for a revival of the pagan alternative" (79). Molnar describes what happens when rationality is privileged over belief:

> For centuries rationalism has been penetrating religion to its core, devastating the mythic, the symbolic, and the liturgical and removing the mystery either by ignoring it as superstition unfit for an age of science or by explaining it as reducible to natural causes. This tendency, far from establishing the rule of reason, has turned reason itself into a narrow perspective on the world. (102)

The increasing privatization of faith only exacerbates these tendencies.

If Molnar is correct, then as the Christian faith becomes progressively more rational and devoid of the supernatural, New Age and paranormal beliefs will also increase: "The spiritual vacuum that prevails in modern society with the complicity of the church makes it quite natural for people to turn to pagan religions and the occult" (164).

Individuals will seek to fill the symbolic gap left in Christianity with supernatural aspects of other faiths (149). Molnar describes the attraction of other faiths:

> [W]hat attracts members of a weakened Christian civilization to Oriental creeds and occult doctrines is ... the presence in each of these new religions of the pantheistic worldview and the hope of self-divinization, or at least self-elevation above the status of mere creature. (182-83)

Syncretism will be common as mythic and symbolic elements of other faiths are grafted onto the Christian faith.

Compensation theory. Some researchers argue that pagan beliefs fill a void. These researchers include Glendinning (593), Granqvist and Hagekull (539), and McKinnon (302). For Granqvist and Hagekull, pagan beliefs serve as a compensation for a lack of secure parental attachment. For Glendinning and McKinnon pagan beliefs fill the void left as Christian beliefs are abandoned. Some researchers describe this approach as a *functional alternative*, where pagan beliefs serve as a replacement for religion, particularly Christianity. Supporters of this approach include Matthew Weeks, Kelly P. Weeks, and Mary R. Daniel (606) and Emmons and Sobal (310). However, Orenstein has failed to find any support for understanding pagan beliefs as a functional alternative to religion.

Marginalization theory. Because research indicates that pagan believers are more marginalized, some researchers propose a theory based on marginalization. In the marginalization theory, those who are marginalized within a particular society have less to lose and, therefore, may be more likely to experiment with and be involved in pagan beliefs (Mencken, Bader, and Stark 201). Researchers who argue in favor of marginalization include Wuthnow (167), Brink (84), and Mencken, Bader, and Stark (201). For instance, some researchers argue that women are more likely to hold pagan

beliefs because of their lack of power within most cultures. Brink found that marginalized girls within a certain Catholic school were more likely to hold pagan beliefs. Other attributes that may lead one to feel marginalized include ethnicity, poor education, and unemployment (Wuthnow 167). Wuthnow argues that pagan beliefs may provide an alternative for Christianity for those who are marginalized (157). However, not all researchers agree with the marginalization theory, and Rice found no support for an increase in pagan beliefs among the marginalized (101).

Compatibility theory. Finally, the compatibility theory attempts to reconcile the small step theory and the marginality theory. Following his work on the marginality theory, Mencken proposed the compatibility theory in which an individual engages in "portfolio diversification" (70). Mencken argues that individuals who are more marginal will have less to lose in privatizing their religion and in including paranormal elements. Individuals who are not marginalized will risk group sanctions if they embrace pagan beliefs and will, therefore, be more likely to take only small steps in religious portfolio diversification.

Spiritual Identity

Since this research focuses on the spiritual identity of pagan Christians, the term *spiritual identity* must be defined as well. However, before spiritual identity can even be addressed, identity in general must be delineated.

Identity

William James was among the first in recent history to explore the concept of the self. James defines the self as everything that belongs to a person:

> [T]he sum total of all that [a man] can call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his

> ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account. (291)

He further refines this definition to include the material self, including the body, the social self, the spiritual self, and the pure ego (292). James comments, concerning the social self, that one may potentially have as many social selves as one has relationships with other individuals, although in practice these are more often groups of people (294). James considers the spiritual self to be the "most enduring and intimate part of the self" (296), although future identity theorists often neglect this aspect of James' theory. Cheryl A. Crawford comments that James believed in a "true self" (91). James differentiates between the objective person, which he calls the "Me" and the subjective thought, which he calls the "I" (371). The *Me*, also labeled the "Empirical Self," includes feelings and actions, while the *I* encompasses the ongoing memories of the individual (371-72). According to Justin B. Poll and Timothy B. Smith, the *I* organizes the *Me*s (130). James appreciates the reflexive nature of the self, commenting that "[we] think ourselves as thinkers" (296). Interestingly Deborah J. Coon argues that James' theory of the self marks a shift from the "religious soul" to the "secular self" (90). Coon comments, "Where the traditional soul had owed its allegiance primarily to God and the spiritual world, the secularized self owed its allegiance to material possessions and other humans" (90). This shift from soul to self accelerated as interest and research on the self progressed.

Erik H. Erikson was the preeminent modern researcher to consider the developmental aspects of identity. Erikson's theory proposed a series of crises that individuals must resolve in the development of their own identities. These stages included trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt,

industry versus inferiority, identity versus identity confusion, intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation, and integrity versus despair (*Identity Youth and Crisis* 94). This process culminates when "[a] unified identity emerges as one integrates childhood identifications and makes basic life commitments" (Berzonsky and Adams 562). However, some researchers have raised questions about Erikson's theory, including the either/or dichotomous nature of the developmental stages (Gross 59).

A variety of definitions for identity have been proposed, depending on the theories from which they arise. For instance, several theorists identify continuity as the salient aspect of identity (Berzonsky and Adams 562; Sanders; Usita 20-21). Jeffery L. Sanders states that an individual's identity defines who he or she is and "encompasses [his or her] sense of continuity in time and space" while also serving as a "framework for future actions." Other theorists emphasize the dynamic nature of identity (Harper-Bisso 351). Some theorists emphasize, similarly to James (294), that an individual can have a multiplicity of selves (e.g., Usita 20-21). Other identity theorists emphasize the unity of identity. Michael D. Berzonsky and Gerald R. Adams speak of identity in terms of "a perceived sense of self-unity across situations and a persistence of personality over time: conservation of self" (562). Still other theorists define identity in terms of interactions (Grenz 94; Mullikin 179). Stanley J. Grenz writes, "[M]y sense of who I am is determined to a great extent by the group of which I am a member" (94). Each of these theories has both strengths and weaknesses.

Many researchers speak less in terms of *identity* and more in terms of the *self*. For instance, Mark R. Leary and June Price Tangney describe the self in terms of the "human capacity for reflexive thinking" and the "ability to think consciously about oneself" (8).

Some researchers speak in terms of self-concept or self-schemata (Epstein 407; Markus 64). Hazel Markus writes, "Self-schemata are cognitive generalizations about the self, derived from past experience, that organize and guide the processing of self-related information contained in the individual's social experiences" (64). As with the identity theorists, some researchers describe the self in terms of relationships, writing that "[i]ndividuals seek a sense of self that is connected to and separate from others with whom they interact" (Poll and Smith 132). Unlike the identity theorists, researchers on the self also talk about the "possible" and "ideal" selves (Markus and Nurius 954; Higgins 320-21), as well as the self that others perceive a person to be (Higgins 318). Leary and Tangney, in an effort to sort out the variety of definitions, note five different usages of the term *self* (6-7). These include the self as a total person, the self as personality, the self as experiencing subject, the self as one's beliefs about oneself, and the self as executive agent.

Related to both identity and the self is self-concept. Hazel Markus and Ziva Kunda argue that the self-concept should really be viewed as a collection of self-conceptions (865) and D. M. Pedersen, Richard N. Williams, and Kristoffer B. Kristensen point out that the self is different from one's awareness of the self (138). Individuals will actively seek information that confirms their self-concept (Swann and Read 1125). William B. Swann, Jr. and Stephen J. Read point out that individuals believe that information that confirms their self-concept is more accurate, and they will actively avoid information that is in conflict with their self-concepts (1125-26).

Given the multiplicity of definitions, a variety of general theories related to the self and identity exist. Poll and Smith describe these ideas as the psychodynamic theory,

the cognitive theory, the systems theory, and the narrative theory (130-32). In addition to these four, social construction theory also deserves attention.

Psychodynamic theory. The psychodynamic theory identity is developed in terms of connections to others, including God (Poll and Smith 130). In the beginning persons are unaware of their selves. As they interact with others, they begin to recognize and form their selves. Finally a mature identity "clearly perceive[s] the self in relation to others" (130). The psychodynamic theory fits well with attachment theory, particularly in terms of identity formation. Proponents of this theory include Erikson and Swann and Read.

Cognitive theory. In cognitive theory identity is formed in terms of meaning making (Poll and Smith 131). As infants, individuals lack the ability for self-reflection. As children begin to mature, they have an increasing ability for self-reflection and the ability to see themselves objectively. Finally, a mature identity results in the integration of an objective self (131). In cognitive theory, development is prompted by lack of congruency between self-schemas and the environment (131). Markus is a well-known cognitive theory researcher.

Self-schemata are one example of identity construction from a cognitive theory perspective. Self-schemata are "cognitive representations derived from *specific* events ... as well as more *general* representations derived from the repeated categorization and subsequent evaluation of the person's behavior by himself and by others around him" (original emphasis; Markus 64). These schemata represent how the self is "differentiated and articulated in memory" (64), and they allow people to generalize beyond their actual experiences. As more information is assimilated into the representation, the self-schemata

become increasingly difficult to change. Markus writes, "[S]elf-schemata can be viewed as implicit theories used by individuals to make sense of their own past behavior and to direct the course of future behavior" (78). Self-schemata provide one possible mechanism for the organizing of one's self.

Systems theory. Systems theory conceives of identity in terms of interpersonal relationships and contexts (Poll and Smith 131). A child is initially part of an "emotionally fused" system (131). As the child grows, he or she increasingly detaches from the parental system. With mature identity comes a sense of separation and distinctiveness from the surrounding systems where a healthy sense of self allows for objectivity (131-32). Growth proceeds when stresses "challenge existing relationships within the system" (131). Support for systems theory comes from existing research on intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity. A primary proponent of the systems theory approach is Edwin H. Friedman.

Narrative theory. Narrative theory proposes that identity is maintained through "meaningful and coherent life-stories" that provide an individual with a sense of continuity across time and space (Poll and Smith 132). According to narrative theory, "Identity emerges through the telling of a personal story by means of which people organize the diverse aspects of their lives into what they see as a meaningful whole" (Grenz 94). In the "prenarrative era," an individual has no self-story. During the "narrative era," he or she begins to create a personal own self-story based on life experiences. Finally, in the "postnarrative era," the individual "reviews the created self-story for a sense of meaning and completeness" (Poll and Smith 132). Growth and development of identity occurs when one's self-story is not sufficient. A healthy identity

has a coherent self-story. Within this context religious identity may occur when individual self-stories are linked to religious communities (132). However, some researchers have issues with narrative theory, arguing that it "understates the role of experience and relationship" (Benson 493). Narrative theory does provide a mechanism for understanding identity.

Social construction theory. In social construction theory, identity is understood entirely within the context of one's relationships. Identity is continuously changing, depending on one's social context (Gergen 7). In social construction theory, no "true self" exists (146). Berzonsky and Adams, describing George Kelly's theory of personal constructs, write that individuals "actively construct the reality within which they live; they implicitly construct hypothesis and theories as they attempt to understand, predict, and control events and circumstances encountered in daily life" (566). Social construction theory explains the potential fluidity of an individual's self-concept.

In addition to these overarching theories of identity, one further concept deserves mention: possible selves. Possible selves refer to individuals' future potential selves rather than their present selves. Markus and Nurius describe the importance of possible selves:

> Expanding the scope of the self-concept to include possible selves allows us to account for both its situational and temporal malleability and for its overall stability. The now self, the self that is very much a part of the public domain may indeed remain basically stable.... However, because possible selves are less tied to behavioral evidence and less bounded by social reality constraints, they may be quite responsive to change in the environment. (964)

The possible self is constructed based on the individual's past experience and may be domain specific. The possible self may not have been verified or confirmed and may not

be well anchored in actual social experiences (955-56). James, writing almost one hundred years earlier, also describes both potential and actual selves (311), and the possible self may be similar to Freud's "ego ideal" (Markus and Nurius 956). The possible self stands in contrast to the authentic self:

> To suggest that there is a single self to which one "can be true" or an authentic self that one can know is to deny the rich network of potential that surrounds individuals and that is important in identifying and descriptive of them. (965)

Indeed, the possible self may be significantly more malleable than the actual self.

Markus and Kunda address the stability of the self and argue that the self is both stable and malleable (864). Self-conceptions appear to endure while possible selves may be more changeable (Markus and Nurius 965). Roy F. Baumeister takes a slightly different approach and argues that attributes that are assigned to the individual (e.g., race, gender) are relatively stable and unproblematic (171). Identity that is acquired by achievement also appears to be stable and unproblematic, once acquired. However, attributes that are acquired by choice appear to be continually redefined.

In summary, one's identity can be seen as a representation of one's self, based on experience and social context, in order to give meaning and direction to one's life. Identity includes both existing and possible selves. Within one's overall identity may be domain-specific identities, such as religious or spiritual identity.

Religious Identity

Religious or spiritual identity[1] is an important component of one's identity. Kiesling et al. write, "Role-related spiritual identity is important in constructing ego

[1] Throughout this paper religious identity and spiritual identity are synonymous. However, a number of researchers make good arguments that religious identity and spiritual identity may refer to different constructs.

identity" (60), and religious belief has been identified as a key aspect of an individual's identity (Fisherman 380). An individual's religious identity is part of who he or she is.

Poll and Smith, in an attempt to define spiritual identity, describe it as "an individual's belief that she or he is an eternal being and connected to God" (129). Cindy L. Anderton describes it more broadly as "[a] person's particular religious group affiliation and respective beliefs" (19). Spiritual identity includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects (Templeton and Eccles 254) and "emerges as the symbolic religious and spiritual content of a culture is appropriated by individuals in the context of their own life" (Kiesling et al. 51). Paul Wink and Michelle Dillon describe spiritual identity as "[t]he self's existential search for ultimate meaning through an individualized understanding of the sacred" (79). Grenz points out that "People long for an identity that only God can give through a relationality that only God can fulfill" (96). Spiritual identity encompasses individuals' understanding of themselves in relation to God.

Some researchers distinguish between personal religious identity and collective religious identity (Templeton and Eccles 253). Collective religious identities may be either assigned or chosen (254). Whether one's collective religious identity is assigned or chosen depends largely on whether the individual has engaged in a deliberate evaluation and made an intentional commitment to the religious group (254). A significant similarity exists between the assignment or choice of a religious identity and Marcia's identity statuses.

Community appears to be an integral part of religious identity formation. Grenz argues that community helps an individual connect with the transcendent (94), although methods of connecting with the transcendent exist that do not require a community.

Peggy Lynn Mullikin states that spiritual identity is "[f]ormed through interactions with family and peers as well as participation in formal and informal religious groups and services" (179). However, James Fowler argues that spiritual identity defined entirely in terms of external authority is dangerous (154), and authority must ideally be relocated within the self (179).

Personal religious identity is important. Hans Alma and Hetty Zock describe commitment, sensitivity, and personal resonance as being especially important to personal spiritual identity (3). Spiritual identity may be related to personal pain and sorrow (Kiesling et al. 61) and is often associated with prosocial behavior (Furrow, King, and White 24). Adolescents who hold a religious identity tend to report more meaningful lives that "offer direction and fulfillment" (23). Finally Poll and Smith describes a person's spiritual identity as that which "corresponds with what they believe God to be" (134). Spiritual identity is an important component of one's overall identity.

However, not all spiritual identities can be so neatly articulated. In some cases spiritual identities are constructed from a myriad of sources and faiths, a process that is referred to as "bricolage" (Harper-Bisso 295-96). In describing this process, Grenz writes, "The postmodern condition, therefore, entails the replacement of the stability and unity that characterized the self of the modern ideal with ... the splintering of the self into multiple subjectivities" (93). Within the Neo-Pagan movement, this spiritual identity is developed and constructed through "conversion narratives" (Harper-Bisso 327).

Jacqueline S. Mattis et al. propose that spiritual identity develops when "the conflicts that arise ... can serve as foundations for crafting mature spirituality" (291), and Wink and Dillon concur (92). Janice L. Templeton and Jacquelynne S. Eccles describe

the importance of transcendent personal experiences (254). Poll and Smith align spiritual identity maturity with "how accurately an individual's God image corresponds with his or her environment and, more importantly, with his or her own behaviors and spiritual experiences" (134-35) and allow that at times spiritual identity may regress.

Research indicates that religious involvement as a child leads to further spiritual development throughout life (Wink and Dillon 92). The development of one's spiritual identity continues throughout the lifespan (Kiesling et al. 60), sometimes increasing in later life (Wink and Dillon 91), and is often nonlinear (Poll and Smith 134-35). Unlike other developmental processes, spiritual identity development often proceeds fluidly.

Theories of spiritual identity development have been proposed by a number of researchers, including Fowler and Poll and Smith. Poll and Smith propose four stages, including pre-awareness, awakening, recognition, and integration (133-34). Fowler identifies seven stages: undifferentiated faith, intuitive-projective faith, mythic-literal faith, synthetic-conventional faith, individuative-reflective faith, conjunctive faith, and universalizing faith (113). Both of these developmental theories recognize the importance of internalizing faith and making it one's own. Spiritual identities develop over time.

While the research on pagan Christian identity is scarce, some research does exist on neo-pagans. Susan Harper-Bisso finds that neo-pagans often come out of Christianity and "construct their identities in opposition to Christian identities" (262). She describes the fluidity of the spiritual identities of neo-pagans:

> I expected that NeoPagans would construct what Goffman (1959) has termed "front stage" and "back stage" identities to deal with the threat (real or perceived) of persecution from nonNeoPagans. This is not exactly what I found. Instead, like so many things in the NeoPagan community, identity appears to exist on a continuum, and to be remarkably fluid. Rather than having two identities—one to employ with NeoPagans and the

> other for use with nonNeoPagans—NeoPagans appear to invoke certain aspects of their identity and withhold others depending on the situation. (343)

According to Harper-Bisso, neo-pagans appear to have a single spiritual identity that they selectively reveal, depending on the context. Pagan Christians may use this same approach in their own identities. Alternatively, they may create separate pagan and Christian spiritual identities that they use depending on the context.

Identity Status

Identity is a notoriously difficult concept to measure. In an effort to measure identity development, James E. Marcia proposes four identity statuses, including diffused, foreclosed, moratorium, and achieved status (557). Each of these statuses falls in a different quadrant when plotted on axes of exploration and commitment. For instance, diffused individuals are neither committed nor exploring. Foreclosed individuals are committed but uninterested in spiritual exploration. Individuals who are in moratorium engage in exploration but have yet to make a commitment to any particular identity. Only achieved individuals have both explored and made a commitment.

Research by Bruce Hunsberger, Michael Pratt, and S. Mark Pancer confirmed Marcia's identity statuses (383). While these identity statuses were not originally intended to measure spiritual identity status, Chris Kiesling and Gwen Sorell demonstrated that they applied equally in a spiritual context (268). However, an individual's identity status may vary across different domains (e.g., religion; occupation; Berzonsky and Adams 562).

Research has generally supported the idea that identity status proceeds from diffusion to foreclosure to moratorium to achievement (Berzonsky and Adams 574), but

some researchers have found the degree of change smaller than anticipated (Kroger, Martinussen, and Marcia 694). In general, individuals are more likely to move into the achievement status in late adolescence (693), at least in part because they are "socially supported and implemented" (684). Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer describe this movement as a "progressive developmental process" (366). However, Kiesling and Sorell point out that this developmental process is "more discretionary" than other identity processes (268).

Identity status and religious commitment are not always equivalent. For instance, Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer point out that regular church attendance, which is associated with religious commitment, may be linked with both achieved and foreclosed identity statues (367). Caution should, therefore, be exercised in conflating spiritual maturity, as measured through spiritual identity status, with religious commitment.

However, not all research has supported the idea that moratorium is a more advanced identity status than foreclosure, and Marcia questions whether diffusion or foreclosure should be considered the lowest status based on a study of performance on a number of task variables (558). Indeed Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer examined the relationship between each identity status and an individual's usage of confirmatory information (383). They discovered that while individuals who were in moratorium did indeed seek more information, they generally only sought negative information. Foreclosed individuals also sought information, but only positive information that confirmed their beliefs. Not surprisingly, diffused individuals were interested in neither positive nor negative information. Only achieved individuals considered both positive and negative information in evaluating their spiritual alternatives.

Over the last few decades, a number of studies have been conducted to examine Marcia's identity statuses. These studies evaluated identity status both in and out of a religious context. Results have been largely consistent.

Diffusion. The diffuse identity status is characterized by both a lack of exploration and a lack of commitment. Diffused identity is characterized by increased doubting (Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer 382) as well as increased searching, as measured by the Quest sale (Watson and Morris 378). A diffused identity also shows a tendency toward low intrinsic religiosity (Fulton 7). Diffused identity is associated with a lack of adjustment (Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer 382) and a lack of faith maturity (Sanders). Berzonsky and Adams, referencing Adams, report that those with a diffused identity status have the lowest levels of ego functioning (571) as well as an avoidant approach to processing (573). Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer confirm that individuals with a diffused identity status tend to avoid information about beliefs, regardless of whether it validates or challenges those beliefs (383). Finally, Marcia proposes that the diffused status may actually include two extremes: the playboy and the schizoid personality type (558). Together these findings paint a picture of an identity that is neither well-defined nor functioning well.

Foreclosure. The foreclosed identity status is characterized by commitment without exploration. Parents often play an important role in the foreclosed individuals sense of identity (Marcia 578). Kiesling et al. describe the importance of family and friends for foreclosed individuals:

> For foreclosed individuals, family, ethnicity, and religious tradition combined to be highly determinative of self-evaluation. The people with whom foreclosed persons shared their spiritual commitments tended to be

> family and friends who affirmed their sense of self and ensured continuity in the transmission of spiritual tradition across generations. (55)

Foreclosed individuals were more likely to have an extrinsic orientation (Fulton 10), with significant others holding "enormous sway" over these individuals' spiritual identities (Kiesling et al. 54). Individuals with a foreclosed identity status tend to endorse "authoritarian values such as obedience, strong leadership, and respect for authority" (Marcia 557). Berzonsky and Adams describe foreclosed individuals as holding "rigidly organized construct systems" that are undifferentiated (568). Interestingly, Jane Kroger, Monica Martinussen, and James E. Marcia found the foreclosed status to be the most stable overall (692-93), although less so at younger ages when the individual may engage in new periods of exploration (684).

These individuals did little questioning of their beliefs (Kiesling et al. 56). Researchers have often assumed that this lack of questioning indicated that these individuals do not seek any information related to their beliefs, but research by Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer proved that foreclosed individuals did seek information, albeit only information that validated and confirmed their beliefs (383), avoiding negative information that might threaten their beliefs (383). Interestingly, Marcia found that foreclosed individuals were easily swayed by negative information (557), so this strategy of avoidance may be self-protective. Indeed Berzonsky and Adams describe the foreclosed individuals' processing orientation as "normative and avoidant" (573).

Finally, while Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer found the foreclosed identity status unrelated to overall adjustment (382), Marcia found that foreclosed individuals maintain unattainably high goals, which they are unwilling to moderate (557). Kiesling et al. note

that for foreclosed individuals, spiritual identity is an important aspect of their self-worth, so much so that they cannot even envision a loss of that identity (55, 59).

Moratorium. The moratorium identity status exhibits considerable exploration but without any commitment. Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer write, "[M]oratorium status is associated with searching for information that is inconsistent with religious teachings but a decreased tendency to consult belief-consistent sources" (383). Marcia describes the moratorium status as being similar to achievement but with more variability (557). Kroger, Martinussen, and Marcia agree, describing moratorium as the least stable of the identity statuses, in large part because of increases in anxiety and discomfort (692). Individuals in moratorium are less likely to be intrinsically motivated (Fulton 9; Kiesling, et al. 56), and more likely to have high quest scores (Fulton 9; Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer 382). Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer found that individuals in the moratorium status are less well-adjusted (382).

Whereas foreclosed individuals seek only confirmatory information, individuals who are in moratorium tended to avoid information that might confirm their religious beliefs (Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer 383). While they often have serious doubts, they also considered themselves to be the "sole arbiters of truth," regardless of the disapproval of others (Kiesling et al. 57). Not surprisingly individuals who are in the moratorium status describe themselves as becoming less religious (Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer 384), even though their spiritual identity is a moderate to significant factor in their self-worth (Kiesling et al. 57). Individuals in moratorium appear to be struggling to define their identity.

Achieved. The achieved identity status is characterized by both exploration and commitment. These individuals tend to be less authoritarian (Marcia 557), more integrated, and have the highest ego functioning (Berzonsky and Adams 568, 571). They demonstrate better personal adjustment, higher self-esteem, more optimism, and less depression (Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer 382). Kiesling et al. write, "[T]heir sense of spiritual identity had maximum impact on their self-perceptions, self-evaluations, and sense of self-worth" (59). Similarly Sanders describes the achieved individual as being better at both "service to humanity and service to God." Overall achieved individuals demonstrate a more intrinsic orientation towards religion (Fulton 10), with "more time investments and more behavioral ways of expressing their spiritual identity" (Kiesling et al. 59). The achieved identity status is generally more stable, although perhaps less so at younger ages (Kroger, Martinussen, and Marcia 684, 692-93).

Perhaps most interestingly, those with an achieved identity status construct their identity using an informational processing approach (Berzonsky and Adams 573). Unlike the foreclosed, who only use confirmatory informational sources, and those in moratorium, who only used negative sources, the achieved are more likely to use both positive and negative information (Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer 384). Furthermore, their sense of identity is not threatened by negative information (Marcia 557). Finally, they describe themselves as using a "different way of knowing" (Kiesling et al. 58).

Marcia's identity statuses provide a means of examining identity, particularly spiritual identity. The identity statuses of pagan Christians are unclear. Pagan Christians could easily be categorized as being in moratorium: no clear commitment to a single belief system and a willingness to explore their options. Alternatively, pagan Christians

may be in a foreclosed status, unwilling to examine any information that might cause them to question their beliefs. If pagan Christians are indeed in a foreclosed status, then one might expect that this status might cause increased psychological discomfort and cognitive dissonance. Pagan Christians could be in a diffused identity status, although this identity status seems unlikely given their investment in both pagan and Christian beliefs. Finally, pagan Christians may hold an achieved identity status, having both explored and committed to both their pagan and Christian beliefs. If indeed pagan Christians have attained an achieved identity status, this status will raise interesting questions about the depth and breadth of their exploration of both Christian and pagan beliefs.

Conflicting Beliefs and Identities

Individuals create spiritual identities out of both pagan and Christian beliefs, but the mechanism by which they construct their spiritual identities has not been studied. One possible approach is that pagan Christians may meld these beliefs together into a single spiritual identity. If their spiritual identity is created by melding, then inconsistencies between these beliefs will most likely prove stressful. For instance, Seymour Epstein describes the disorganization that can happen when the premises that underlie an identity are compromised:

> The recognition that an individual's self-theory, like any other theory, is a hierarchically organized conceptual system for solving problems, can explain its total disorganization when a basic postulate is invalidated, or when, for some other reason, the theory is incapable of fulfilling its functions. (416)

Information that demonstrates conflict between pagan and Christian beliefs may prove quite threatening and may generate severe cognitive dissonance.

Alternatively, pagan Christians may create separate spiritual identities, one for their pagan beliefs and another for their Christian beliefs. Based on Kenneth J. Gergen's social construction theory, these individuals may call on each identity as needed. In this case, the separate identities may rarely encounter each other, and conflict and stress should be significantly diminished.

Whether holding both pagan and Christian beliefs is stressful for an individual may also very well depend on their spiritual identity status. An individual in moratorium has no significant commitment either to the pagan or the Christian beliefs and so the potential conflict between these belief systems may not generate any stress or discomfort for the individual. A foreclosed individual may well find the conflict between pagan and Christian beliefs quite stressful.

No Discrepancy

Christians who also hold pagan beliefs may experience no conflict between their differing worldviews (Snow and Machalek 23). David A. Snow and Richard Machalek write, "Beliefs may withstand the pressure of disconfirming events not because of the effectiveness of dissonance-reducing strategies, but because disconfirming evidence may simply go unacknowledged" (23). They may be "ignoring input rather than resisting" (Benassi, Singer, and Reynolds 348) the conflict in beliefs. Snow and Machalek describe the tendency to maintain rather than question beliefs:

> The persistence of belief can ... be approached from at least two assumptions: (1) believing is natural; doubting requires an "unnatural" exertion of will in order to overcome the inertia of taken-for-grantedness; (2) doubting is natural; believing requires an "unnatural" exertion of will to overcome the inertia of skepticism. Given the amount of research devoted to explaining how people maintain beliefs, it seems that most social scientists subscribe to the second assumption. Nevertheless, there is

> sound theoretical reasoning on which to assume that people are typically inclined toward belief rather than disbelief. (24)

Some pagan Christians may have no cognitive dissonance because they have no apparent conflict in their beliefs.

Self-Discrepancy

For some pagan Christians their pagan beliefs may conflict with their Christian beliefs. This conflict is often the result of spiritual exploration (Gebelt, Thompson, and Miele 229) and can lead to increased stress, particularly if they encounter "disapproval or rejections from others who hold different beliefs" (Exline, Yali, and Sanderson 1492). This description of conflict, involving rejection and disapproval, would be especially salient for those in a foreclosed spiritual identity status. These conflicts can be caused not only by clashes between competing belief systems but also by a sense of alienation from God, disagreement with religious institutions, conflicts with families or friends (1490-91) or disagreement with religious doctrines (Exline 186). Research indicates that religious strain or conflict can cause significant psychological distress (Exline, Yali, and Sanderson 1490).

Another way of looking at this conflict is in terms of identity. E. Tory Higgins points out that individuals are motivated to reach a state in which they achieve congruency in their self-concept(s) (321). When self-discrepancy exists, when individuals are not the persons they thought they were, they will experience distress. The degree of distress will be determined by the discrepancy: "The greater the magnitude and accessibility of a particular type of self-discrepancy possessed by an individual, the more the individual will suffer the kind of discomfort associated with that type of self-discrepancy" (324). The degree of self-discrepancy will depend on the recency,

frequency, and relevancy of the belief (324). For some pagan Christians, this self-discrepancy may be experienced as cognitive dissonance.

Cognitive Dissonance

Leon Festinger first described cognitive dissonance in 1957. Cognitive dissonance can occur when a decision is made between two alternatives, when behavior is at variance with beliefs, when new information is at conflict with existing information, when disagreement occurs within a group, or when a belief is invalidated. The degree of dissonance will depend on the importance of the beliefs or behaviors. Once cognitive dissonance exists, the individual will experience a drive to reduce the dissonance, with the strength of the drive depending on the degree of dissonance that is occurring (261-63).

Once dissonance occurs it can be reduced in a number of different ways. For instance, dissonance can be reduced by changing one or more of the causal elements (Festinger 264). Adding new cognitive elements that are consistent with existing cognitive elements can also reduce dissonance. Dissonance can be reduced by decreasing the importance of one of the existing causal elements. Festinger concludes that cognitive dissonance caused by new information "will frequently result in misinterpretation and misperception of the new information ... in an effort to avoid a dissonance increase" (265). Once recognized, dissonance can be reduced.

Practically speaking, within a spiritual context, cognitive dissonance can occur when beliefs or spiritual identities are incompatible. James, writing about the self, describes one mechanism by which cognitive dissonance might occur:

> A tolerably unanimous opinion ranges the different selves of which a man may be "seized and possessed," and the consequent different orders of his

> self-regard, in an *hierarchical scale, with the bodily Self at the bottom, the spiritual Self at the top, and the extracorporeal material selves and the various social selves between* [original emphasis]. (313)

Cognitive dissonance can be reduced through a number of options. For instance, individuals can change their beliefs in order to reduce cognitive dissonance. Julie Juola Exline describes this changing of beliefs as "cafeteria style religion" (187). Alternatively they can base their beliefs on their own preferences (187), thereby reducing the importance of others' opinions. Another term for basing beliefs on personal preferences is "do-it-yourself" spirituality. Jacqueline Hodder interviewed individuals who used this approach:

> [T]he participants in this study valued their ability to choose beliefs which best reflected their internal values and which seemed to "fit"... what these young people seemed to value the most was an autonomy over doctrine rather than autonomy over a collective communal orientation. New Age participants could not reconcile their own deeply held beliefs with a church doctrine that seemed at odds with these beliefs. (205)

Exline notes that both cafeteria and do-it-yourself approaches to spirituality ultimately "draw people away from orthodoxy" (187). Finally, individuals can avoid cognitive dissonance by abandoning their beliefs entirely or by looking for a *better* belief system (187). Grenz describes the decoupling of spiritual beliefs from religious practice:

> The readiness of people today to divorce spiritual from religious practice in general and Christianity in particular has lead [sic] many to claim that they have discovered spiritual meaning in non-religious activities. Proponents of this viewpoint, which is sometimes known as "secular spiritual," routinely use terms that were once closely connected with the Christian tradition—such as "soul"—while purging from them the theological meanings they formerly carried. (88)

All of these methods provide a means to reduce cognitive dissonance, particularly within a spiritual context.

Theological Framework

Any attempt to understand spiritual identity from a Christian perspective must first begin with God, and God's holiness. Humanity, and identity, can only be understood within the context of the creator. Because humankind is created in God's image, God's essential nature impacts humankind's being and understanding of themselves.

God's Holiness

Scripture attests to God's holiness. The psalmist proclaims, "[T]he Lord our God is holy" (99:9) and the seraphim echo, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty" (Isa. 6:3). J. R. Williams describes holiness as God's "essential nature; it is not so much an attribute of God as it is the very foundation of his being" (562). God and holiness are synonymous.

At its root, holiness implies separateness. Williams writes, "The Hebrew word for holy ... in its fundamental meaning contains the note of that which is separate or apart" (562). Scripture supports this understanding: "for am I God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst" (Hos. 11:9). God is separate from humanity.

Humanity's Call to Holiness

Because God is holy, his people were called to be holy, to be set apart. In Leviticus, God tells the Hebrews, "For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy" (11:44). Similarly, in Deuteronomy the Hebrews are told, "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God." (7:6a). Because God was holy, the Hebrews were called to be holy, to be set apart, as well.

This understanding of humanity's call to holiness continues into the New Testament. Paul writes, in his letter to the Hebrews, "We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ" (Heb. 10:10, NIV). Paul tells the Ephesians to

"put off your old self … and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:22-24). Again, to the church in Thessalonica, he writes, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4:3). This same understanding is also found in Peter, where he writes, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written 'You shall be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Pet. 1:14-16). Holiness is not an optional extra part of a Christian's spiritual identity but instead an integral part of who they are in Christ.

Pagan Worldview

Throughout the Old Testament, the holiness expected of God's people is contrasted with the beliefs and behaviors of the pagan cultures around them. Joshua reminds the Israelites to serve the Lord, saying, "Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the river and in Egypt, and serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:14b). Not much later "the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers…" (Judg. 2:11-12a; see also Judg. 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6). Judah struggles with pagan worship as well: "Judah did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and they provoked him to jealousy with their sins that they committed.… They did according to all the abominations of the nations that the Lord drove out before the people of Israel" (1 Kings 14:22-24). God's people are expected to keep themselves separate from the cultures around them. This separation is required not because of ethnic purity but because of fundamental differences in worldviews.

One way of understanding these differences is in terms of *continuity*. Pagan cultures throughout history have endorsed a continuity worldview. John N. Oswalt describes this worldview as one in which "all things are continuous with each other" (43), as does Molnar (125). Yehezkel Kaufmann argues that this view derives from the belief that both the gods and humanity originate from the same "world stuff" that removes any separation between humanity and the gods (35). God and the universe are connected through a "natural bond" (Kaufmann 68; Molnar 165). Because no intrinsic separation exists between the gods and humanity, the gods are not considered to be sovereign (Kaufmann 38). Furthermore, since no separation exists between humanity and the gods, humans may also become gods (Kaufmann 36; Molnar 168). In the continuity worldview, no differences or separations may remain among humanity, nature, and the divine. Everything is connected.

Because no separation or differences exist among objects in the continuity worldview, the object and its name are the same thing (Oswalt 48). Similarly, "there is no distinction between symbol and reality; the symbol *is* the reality" (49). Within continuity, past and future have no meaning: time as well as space are connected (50). Oswalt describes the implications of the continuity worldview:

> If this world and the other world are continuous, then we can affect that other world by what we do here. We are not helpless; we can act out what we want the gods to do and it will be done, not because they must do it, but because in our very actions they *are* doing it. They and we are one. This oneness is always potentially so, but the performance of certain rituals, themselves expressive of continuity, reinforces the reality. (50)

In the continuity worldview, magic is used to manipulate the universe (54-55) and ritual is "automatically efficient and intrinsically significant" (Kaufmann 53). Finally, in the continuity understanding of the divine, no separation is tolerated: "Deity must be part of

me as I must be part of it" (Oswalt 53). Polytheism quickly results along with a very low conception of the gods and of humanity (57-59). Continuity will tolerate no separation.

Such a worldview is antithetical to the biblical worldview communicated throughout Scripture (Molnar 150). In contrast to polytheism, the biblical worldview clearly articulates monotheism (Oswalt 64). In the biblical worldview, God is sovereign, separate and distinct from the world (Kaufmann 60). This view is articulated not only in the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:3) but throughout Scripture. Deuteronomy states, "There is no god beside me" (32:39), and the psalmist states, "For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the Lord made the heavens" (96:5). In the biblical worldview, a single god reigns.

In contrast to the continuity worldview, the biblical worldview states, "God may not be represented in any created form" (Oswalt 65). While those who believe in continuity create idols that both represent and are their gods (Kaufman 14), the bible clearly communicates avoidance of this approach. Again, the Ten Commandments state, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them" (Exod. 20:4-5a). Believers must avoid the worship of any idol or representation of God.

While the continuity worldview expects no separation or division, the biblical worldview clearly describes a universe in which God is separated from humanity, as well as a separation between humanity and nature (Oswalt 66). Humans cannot become gods (Kaufmann 77): "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher

than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Ps. 55:9). The Creator and the creature are ontologically separate.

In the continuity worldview, divination and magic are means of knowing and controlling the connected universe. Because everything is connected, everything can be known as long as one knows the right magic or ritual (Oswalt 55). Scripture clearly condemns both magic and divination as efforts to gain knowledge apart from God (Kaufmann 91). Instead, God's people are commanded to avoid divination and magic: "There shall not be found among you anyone who … practices divination or sells fortunes or interprets omens, or a sorcerer or a charmer or a medium or a wizard or a necromancer…" (Deut. 18:10-11). Similarly, Jeremiah warns the Israelites to avoid astrology, saying, "Learn not the way of the nations, nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens…" (Jer. 10:2). God's people are to look for signs from God rather than use divination and magic to read the signs of the surrounding pagan cultures.

Finally, in the continuity worldview, individuals are ultimately responsible for their own salvation. "It is not the gods who redeem, but knowledge of the secrets of existence" (Kaufmann 40). Kaufmann describes this view: "Salvation is … [humanity's] concern, not the god's" (59). Scripture describes no mechanism for humans to save or redeem themselves. Instead, Scripture clearly states that redemption comes only through Jesus Christ: "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works" (Tit. 2:13b-14). Similarly, Paul told the Colossians, "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Col. 1:13-14). To

the Ephesians he wrote, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the richness of his grace" (Eph. 1:7). Paul gave the Romans a similar message: "[F]or all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ" (Rom. 3:23-24). As with revelation, true salvation comes from God.

Consistently, the continuity worldview and the biblical worldview are diametrically opposed and at odds with each other (Oswalt 80). Oswalt argues that the biblical understanding of God's transcendence accounts for these differences:

> God is not the cosmos, and the cosmos is not God. God is radically other than his creation. This thought undergirds everything the Bible says about reality. From start to finish, the Bible adamantly resists the principle of continuity. God and the divine realm are not in any way a part of this world. He is everywhere present *in* the world, but He is *not* the world and world is *not* Him. (original emphasis; 81)

God is separate from his creation. The continuity and biblical worldviews are irreconcilable.

God's people are to keep themselves holy. Kaufmann writes, "The 'charge' of the holy involves only its separation from the profane. It is an expression of reverence, of supreme awe, entirely different from the pagan idea" (104). Kaufman goes on to say, "The Israelite view is a departure from pagan models. It reflects the peculiar notion that YHWH is essentially different from all others gods, that all holiness is limited to him" (126). God is holy, and both God and his people are to keep separate from the surrounding pagan cultures.

Throughout much of the Old Testament, however, the Israelites try to have both: YHWH *and* Baal. Even as Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai (Exod. 19-20), the Israelites turned to worshiping the golden calf (Exod. 32:1-8). This

pattern persists throughout the Old Testament. Indeed, Elijah challenged the Israelites about their worship of both Baal and the Lord: "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). In spite of God's call to holiness, and in spite of God's warnings to keep themselves separate from the surrounding cultures, the Israelites continued throughout much of their history to choose beliefs based on their own interests, rather than on God's guidance. The freedom to believe as they chose was often more important to the Israelites than obeying God's commands.

Throughout biblical history teachers and leaders have not encouraged God's people to remain separate from the pagan cultures surrounding them. The Bible often refers to these individuals as "false teachers" and has nothing but disdain for them (e.g., 2 Pet. 2:1-3; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; Jude 1:3-4). Scripture challenges God's people to beware of false teachers and to avoid them wherever possible.

False Teachers

False teachers are those who lead people astray with the world's wisdom instead of God's wisdom. Paul repeatedly warns his listeners to be wary of being led astray. To the Colossians he warned of being taken "captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world" (Col. 2:8). To the Corinthians he warned of false idols (1 Cor. 10:14-22; 12:1-3). To Timothy he warned of those who have "itching ears" and "accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth to wander off into myths" (2 Tim. 4:1-4). Individuals can be easily led astray if they accept the wisdom of the world as true.

Followers of Jesus must combat this tendency to follow the world's wisdom. Paul tells them, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). Paul is not the only one to recommend testing. John also writes of testing:

> Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error. (1 John 4:1-6)

Wisdom comes from God, not from the world or from the false prophets. Testing, rather than merely accepting everything one hears, helps one discern the truth.

Finally, Paul gave Timothy instructions on how to pastor those who are following false teachers. Paul prepared Timothy to combat heresies:

> I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. (2 Tim. 4:1-2)

Paul instructed Timothy to preach God's word, not the myths of the world. Paul encouraged Timothy always to be ready. Abraham J. Malherbe points out that a true philosopher takes into account the proper time to convey his or her argument based on the situation and the readiness of the listeners. However, Paul instructed Timothy to ignore the correct philosophical approach and preach regardless, "irrespective of the condition of the listeners" (243). Just as Paul, when he wrote the Corinthians, refused to

model his rhetoric on the philosophers, so also was Timothy not to use the philosopher's rhetorical style.

In verse two Paul mirrors the final verses of the previous chapter. There Paul reminded Timothy, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). God's word is sufficient and requires no augmentation. In chapter four Paul challenged Timothy to use this same approach:

> I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. (2 Tim. 4:1-2)

A pastor should, as necessary, teach, reproof, correct, and train in righteousness. By this method a pastor can shine the light of God's truth on the world's falsehood.

False teaching, which blinds, ultimately keeps people from seeing God. Paul explains the source of this blindness:

> [T]he god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor. 4:4-6)

False teachings blind individuals to the *imago Dei*. If they are blind to the *imago Dei* then they are also blind to their true selves. If they cannot recognize God then neither can they recognize their selves.

Identity

While the social sciences can contribute a great deal to understanding humanity, Scripture has much to say as well. James R. Estep, Jr. and Jonathan H. Kim write, "[O]ur humanity is more than the social sciences can discover; it is the *imago Dei*" (11). The creation account describes humanity as being made in the *imago Dei*: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them" (Gen. 1.27). To understand one's self in terms of the *imago Dei* is to understand one's true identity (Weber 41). Philip Edgcumbe Hughes describes the importance for humanity of recognizing the image of God within themselves:

> Nothing is more basic than the recognition that being constituted in the image of God is of the very essence of and absolutely central to the humanness of man. It is the key that unlocks the meaning of his authentic humanity. Apart from this reality, he cannot exist truly as man, since for man to deny God and the divine image stamped upon his being and to assert his own independent self-sufficient is to deny his own constitution and this to dehumanize himself. (4)

However, not all theologians have agreed on what being made in the image of God means for humanity.

Some theologians argue that the *image* of God is different from the *likeness* of God. Tertullian argues, based on Genesis 1:26, that humans are made in God's image, but only through baptism are they restored to the likeness of God (407). Like Tertullian, Origen differentiates between being made in the image and being made in the likeness. However, unlike Tertullian, Origen believes that the fulfillment of the likeness of God will not be accomplished until the eschaton (408). Both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas agree that the image is spiritual rather than physical (Aquinas 93.1; Augustine 12.7.12),

and both see the image of God in the rational nature of humankind, with Augustine in particular seeing the image in a trinity of the mind, which remembers, understands, and loves God (Aquinas 1a q. 93, aa. 7; Augustine 14.12.15), while Aquinas sees the image as going beyond just the soul (Aquinas 1a q. 93, aa. 9). Basil the Great also sees the image of God in the activity of human minds ("Letter 233" 107) and argued that while individuals were created in the image of God, only through the exercise of their own free will they gain the likeness of God ("On the Origin" 43). Basil echoes both Tertullian's and Origen's distinction between being made in the image and being made in the likeness.

In contrast to Tertullian and Origen, John Calvin sees no difference between the *image* and the *likeness*, and instead attributes these differences to the writing style used in Genesis. Instead, Calvin argues that the divine image is in the mind and the heart, although it shines through a person. For Calvin regeneration is the restoration of the image of God (94-95).

John Wesley sees the transformation into the image of God as a transformative process, accomplished through "sanctification and the consecration of a person in their entirety to God" (Harper 135). Wesley believes that regeneration restores believers to God's image ("Great Privilege" 223-24), accomplished by God's grace ("Means of Grace" 189). Unlike Augustine and Aquinas, Wesley believes that this transformation affects more than just the mind: "The beauty of holiness, of that inward man of the heart which is renewed after the image of God, cannot but strike every eye which God hath opened ..." ("Sermon on the Mount" 294). Being made in the image of God is inherently transformative.

In contrast to earlier theologians, who understood the *imago Dei* in largely substantive terms, more recent theologians argue that the image of God should be understood in either functional or relational terms (Boyd and Eddy 102-09; Highfield 21). The functional approach argues that the image of God should be understood in terms of Genesis 1:26, in which humankind is told to "have dominion over … all the earth." Theologians have pointed out that this *dominion* is not an invitation to rape and pillage creation. Instead, it should be understood as stewardship in which humankind is entrusted with caring for the earth as God's agent (Hiebert 20).

In contrast to the functional approach, theologians such as Barth argue from a relational perspective. For Barth, being made in the image of God means that humanity, like the Trinity, is made for love. This love extends beyond love of themselves alone and includes love of each other (Boyd and Eddy 106). Estep writes, "[W]e reflect His image by being in relationship with one another and Him" (18). The image is to be understood not in terms of what an individual does but in terms of the people with whom they are in relationship. Individuals must be in relationship not just with each other but with God as well.

No Scripture explicitly defines the attributes of the *imago Dei.* However, Scripture provides a guide: Two passages clearly refer to Jesus as the perfect image of God. Paul describes Jesus as "the image of God" to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 4:4) and as "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation" to the Colossians (Col. 1:15). Jesus is the visible manifestation of the invisible God (Johnson 10), so by looking at Jesus individuals gain an understanding of their own creation and purpose.

Unfortunately, humanity failed to fulfill that purpose and became marred by sin. Their understanding of who they were, and who they were in relationship to God, was broken. However, humanity is still made in the image of God. Estep and Kim write, "[M]uch like a broken mirror can still reflect an image, humanity still possesses the *imago Dei* but as a poor reflection of the One whose image we bear" (22). Jesus, through his acts on humankind's behalf, restores individuals to God. M. Robert Mulholland, Jr. states that this transformation occurs "at the point of our unlikeness to Christ's image" as God works where individuals are most broken (37). Paul describes this process as the image of God is renewed:

> So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (2 Cor. 4:16-18)

Individuals are renewed in Christ, into the *imago Dei.*

This renewal of the *imago Dei* is sometimes described in terms of the *self.* Paul writes to the church in Colossae, "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Col. 3:9-10). Likewise, Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, challenging them to abandon the self they created:

> [P]ut off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and ... be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and ... put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4:22-24)

The Corinthians are similarly advised: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). Paul clearly contrasts the false or *old* self with the true or *new* self.

The false self is created in sin, as each individual crafts a self based on his or her own wants and desires. Individuals forget what their *true* self is like. For instance, in describing those who are hearers of the word but not doers, James writes that they are like "a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like" (Jas. 1:23b-24). When persons become so enthralled with their own created images, they lose sight of the *imago Dei*. They substitute their own created selves for the persons they were created to be.

If individuals want to discover their *true* selves, they must let go of their *false* selves. Paul writes, "We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin" (Rom. 6:6). David H. Johnson describes this tension between the old and new selves:

> [B]eing a Christian places a persons [sic] in a tension between what they see in themselves and what they are told is true of them. The new humanity has already been created. If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has passed, the new has come (2 Cor 5:17). But Christians still need to take off the old way of living and to put on Christlike virtues. (12-13)

Individuals cannot cling to the old self if they want to experience the true self. The prodigal son provides an outstanding example of the old and new selves. The son leaves his father's house in search of a better life (Luke 15:12). Since one's self, in both biblical and present times, is so often defined within the crucible of family, this rejection of his family is also a rejection of his present *self*. The son creates a *new* self, focused on "reckless living" (Luke 15:13). This new reckless self does not work out, and the son

finds himself living in famine and squalor (Luke 15:14-16). Here the story gets interesting because Jesus describes the son: "When he came to *himself* [emphasis mine]..." (εἰς ἑαυτὸν δὲ ἐλθὼν; Luke 15:17). The prodigal son recognizes that his *true self* is not the *self* that he has created. This story of return and reconciliation with the father revolves around a letting go of the false self and a return to his true self.

This recognition of the true self is ultimately a learning process. Individuals must come to realize the futility of the false self and come to recognize the true self. If individuals are to be true, they must know what God's truth looks like.

Knowledge and Truth

Who an individual is and how they know and understand the world around them are intricately linked. Tom Beaudoin writes, "This dimension of the knowing subject can be simply stated: how we know is rooted in who we are temporally" (130). If individuals deceive themselves, about their *selves* or about the world around them, truth will be hard to find:

> Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. (1 Cor. 3:18-23)

Wisdom does not come from the world but from God.

All too often people put their faith in the wisdom of men rather than of God. Paul encountered this problem in Corinth. While Corinth had never produced any world-renowned philosophers, they were, like many Greeks, fascinated with philosophy. Herodotus reports that "the Greeks were all occupied in the pursuit of every kind of

knowledge" (4.77), while Gordon D. Fee describes this fascination with philosophy as a "national characteristic" (74). Richard Charles Henry Lenski describes the wisdom of the Greek philosophers:

> The Greeks were of a different type. Having no Bible, they were left to their own thoughts and their own reasonings. They accordingly sought, tried to attain, "wisdom," something in the way of a rational explanation of the universe and of their own being. They demanded principles, chains of reasoning, systems of philosophy which began with some fixed point and reached out as far as possible from that. (65)

Furthermore, rhetoric was important to the Greeks (Plato 458d). In Greek rhetoric the power of persuasion lies in the person and their delivery (Fee 94). Similarly Cyril of Alexandria comments, "Greeks seek glory in speech and eloquence" (25). Greek rhetoric often focused on ἀποδείξει, which in Greek rhetoric was a "compelling proof drawn from premises" (Fee 95). Paul uses the same term in verse 2:4. In many ways, *how* the Greeks communicated was more important to them than *what* they actually said.

Within this cultural context, Paul describes true wisdom:

> And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Cor. 2:1-5)

True wisdom rests ultimately in God and not in the wisdom of people, no matter how persuasively they may speak or how enticing their message. Paul explains that God is the source of true wisdom:

> So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by

> the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (1 Cor. 2:11b-13)

Human wisdom is of the world and does not ultimately lead to God. Anyone who teaches human wisdom leads people away from God.

One example of human wisdom is the pagan worldview. This worldview is based upon human understanding rather than revelation from God. The tenets of the pagan worldview differ significantly from the Christian worldview.

Research Design

A mixed-methods design was used for this research. A mixed-methods model incorporates both quantitative and qualitative measures in an effort to explain phenomena. An explanatory, sequential, mixed-methods design involves collecting quantitative data, followed by qualitative data that is used to help explain the quantitative results (Creswell 542). Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy point out that a mixed-method approach can have a "synergistic" effect (317). The present study tried both to understand and explain how pagan Christians create a coherent sense of spiritual identity in the midst of potentially conflicting core beliefs. Quantitative measures included the pagan belief scale, the short Christian orthodoxy scale, and the social desirability scale. Qualitative measures included the pile sort and the semi-structured interviews. Together these measures provided a mechanism for better understanding pagan Christian spiritual identities.

Pagan Belief Scales

Measuring pagan beliefs can be challenging. One of the most commonly used paranormal measures is the Paranormal Belief Survey created by Tobacyk and Milford in 1983. This survey was revised in 2004. However, questions have been raised about what

the scale is truly measuring and whether it has the correct number of factors (Lawrence, "How Many Factors"; "Moving on from the Paranormal Belief Scale" 133). Furthermore, the scale is long and includes statements that are only indirectly related to pagan beliefs, such as, "The abominable snowman of Tibet exists." Because of these constraints, a different instrument was sought.

After reviewing a number of different scales, questions from the Pew Forum's 2009 Religion and Public Life Survey were selected (19-20). With only eight questions, this scale is short and to the point. The questions address common pagan beliefs, including reincarnation, astrology, and psychics. The availability of published data and statistics from the Religion and Life Survey gives a good baseline for comparison. Each of these questions was followed by a request for respondents to describe how they practiced or experienced each pagan belief.

Christian Belief Scales

This study focused on measuring the prevalence of pagan beliefs in Christian congregations. However, an individual may consider himself or herself to be a Christian and participate in a Christian community without actually espousing Christian beliefs. Therefore, a measurement of Christian beliefs was also important.

As with pagan beliefs, a number of different scales of Christian beliefs exist and have been used in the research literature. These include the Religious Involvement Inventory (Gow et al. 11), the Francis Attitude towards Christianity Scale (Francis, Williams, and Robbins, "Christianity" 341), the Religious Belief and Commitment Short Scale (Erickson 137), the Index of Core Spiritual Beliefs (Hill and Hood 362), and the Short Christian Orthodoxy Scale (Hunsberger 361-62). After evaluation, the Short

Christian Orthodoxy scale was selected because of its concise nature and strong focus on orthodox Christian doctrinal beliefs rather than behaviors. One question from the original Christian Orthodoxy scale concerning the Trinity was added to assess each individual's Christian beliefs further. As with the pagan belief scale, individuals were given the opportunity to describe how they actually practiced each belief.

Social Desirability

Social desirability is defined as "the tendency to provide answers which cause the respondent to look good" (Hancock and Flowers 5-6). For instance, drug use or abusive behaviors may be underreported in an effort to appear to be more in line with social norms. Some researchers partition social desirability into two factors: "self-deception" and "other deception" (Nederhof 264). Social desirability effects can be a factor in many types of research, especially when the research topic is of a particularly sensitive nature, such as drug use.

Some researchers have hypothesized that a need to appear *good* spiritually may influence whether individuals will admit to holding pagan beliefs (Mencken, Bader, and Stark 195). For instance, persons who consider themselves to be *good* Christians may not admit to believing in astrology because *good* Christians should not hold those beliefs. For instance Foster, Smith, and Stovin found that manipulation of pro- and anti-paranormal statements did impact paranormal belief measures. Therefore, a measure was needed of the degree to which a person was likely to *skew* their own responses in order to look better.

Edwards' 1957 Social Desirability Scale was the first attempt to measure social desirability. Based on items from the MMPI, Edward's Social Desirability scale

unfortunately tended to measure pathology as well. The Marlowe-Crowne Social Desirability Scale was developed from a number of personality inventories in order to address this issue (Barger 286-87). However, the scale had issues of its own. Researchers could not agree on whether the Marlowe-Crowne scale had one factor or two (or more) or on what those factors represented. Regardless of this fact, and the reality that some of the questions on the scale have become dated, the Marlowe-Crowne scale continues to be the most common mechanism for identifying social desirability.

To simplify usage of the Marlowe-Crowne scale, a number of short scales were developed by William M. Reynolds and by Robert Strahan and Kathleen Carrese Gerbasi. These new short scales have resulted in ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, and twenty-item scales (Fischer and Fick 419). Analysis of all the different short forms found that the X1 scale with ten items was the best, surpassing even the original Marlowe-Crowne scale (423). A revised version of the X1 scale, with only six items, was also found to be sufficient although not as good as the original X1 scale.

However, a number of studies have raised questions about the reliability and validity of the Marlowe-Crowne scales, including the short forms. Timothy P. Johnson and Michael A. Fendrich found only weak evidence for the validity of the original scale (1644). Barger's analysis of all of the short forms found a consistent lack of internal consistency (293). Indeed, he contends that the "apparent adequacy of shorter forms ... probably is an artifact of the less demanding covariance structure ... in a model with fewer indicators" (296) and recommends against the use of either the Marlowe-Crowne scale or any of its shorter forms (298-99). Adrian Sargeant Lee argues that social desirability effects need to be understood within each individual research context (714),

and Joachim Stöber points out the language of the Marlowe-Crowne scale is increasingly dated (3).

To address some of the issues inherent in the Marlowe-Crowne scale, Stöber created a new scale. Behaviors were identified that were either "socially desirable but infrequent or socially undesirable but frequent" (3). These items were then analyzed, resulting in seventeen remaining items with correlations of greater than .20. This instrument was named the SDS-17. Ultimately one question related to drug use was dropped, leaving a sixteen-item scale (12). Reliability over four weeks was found to be good, and when compared with the Marlowe-Crowne scale, the SDS-17 also showed considerable validity (11). The SDS-17 scale was translated and validated within an American context by Brian F. Blake et al. (1634). Based on these reliability and validity measurements, the SDS-17 scale was chosen for use in this study.

Mechanisms do exist for reducing social-desirability effects, especially on sensitive topics. These include indirect questions (Fisher and Tellis 566), anonymity (Fisher, "Social Desirability Bias" 313), randomized responses, and bogus pipelines (Fisher, "Future of Social-Desirability Bias Research" 74). Anton J. Nederhof proposes that social desirability can be reduced through self-administration of surveys (through mail or e-mail) rather than through phone or face-to-face interviews, although Nederhof allows that not all research supports this conclusion (272). *Task-oriented* interviewers can reduce social desirability effects (274). Social desirability can also be reduced during data analysis by rejecting all the data of any subject with a high social desirability score by noting the impact of social desirability upon the data or by correcting the data of individuals with high social desirability scores (van de Mortel 46).

Finally, Daniel C. Ganster, Harry W. Hennessey, and Fred Luthans point out that many studies measuring social desirability appear to be related neither to the independent variable nor to the dependent variable. They state, "This suggests that [social desirability] is of interest as a variable in its own right and not just as a source of bias in measurement" (330). Given that the need to appear good may be a factor in the measurement of pagan beliefs, a measure of social desirability was included in the present study.

Summary

The research indicates that pagan beliefs are pervasive in Western culture and common in Western churches. Hanegraaff speaks about the prevalence of New Age beliefs in Christian churches:

> The academic theologian who visits a Sunday church service may be reassured by the impression that not too many things seem to have changed; but this impression is deceptive. If he could read the minds of the churchgoers, he would find that many of them are playing, although to various extents, with ideas for which his professional training has never prepared him: beliefs about reincarnation and karma, angels as spiritual messengers and helpers, paranormal assistance from the divine world, new channeled revelations such as those of the apostle Paul directed to the Dutch churches, newly-discovered gnostic gospels, Celestine prophecies, and a whole complex of ideas and assumptions intimately connected with them. (311)

Little research has looked at the incidence of pagan beliefs by denomination although considerable research has examined pagan beliefs within the context of Christianity.

Given the prevalence of Christians who also hold pagan beliefs, this study examined how these individuals perceive their own spiritual identity. Based on the identity literature, three main possibilities present themselves: (1) pagan Christians perceive no conflict between their pagan and Christian beliefs; (2) pagan Christians will

perceive a conflict between their pagan and Christian beliefs, which will cause them distress, potentially experienced in terms of cognitive dissonance; or, (3) pagan Christians will be aware of conflicts between their pagan and Christian beliefs but not care, thereby experiencing no distress.

Pagan Christians' spiritual identity statuses may vary as well. While pagan Christians may be in a diffused identity status, their exploration and commitment to both pagan and Christian beliefs make this status unlikely. Some pagan Christians may be entrenched in moratorium, and their smorgasbord approach to spirituality may be experienced in terms of both Christian and pagan beliefs. This moratorium status may be more likely if the individual is actively seeking negatively confirming information. Alternatively pagan Christians may be foreclosed, committed to a secular faith that they have never examined in enough detail to recognize its inconsistency. In this case pagan Christians would actively seek confirmatory information to support their spiritual identity choices. Pagan Christians may report an achieved spiritual identity status in which they are using both positive and negative information sources. Generally, pagan Christians will not be in a diffused identity status.

More general questions can also be asked about pagan Christian identity. Based on the different identity theories, pagan Christians may socially construct their spiritual identity. Pagan Christians who construct their spiritual identities are less likely to perceive themselves as having a *true* identity, and the pagan Christian identity may be one of many identities that they assume. If so their commitment to this identity may be more flexible and particularly prone to change as their social context changes.

Pagan Christian identity may be created more in terms of cognitive theory's self-schemas. In this case pagan identity is constructed in terms of an individual's self-theories. This kind of pagan Christian identity may be vulnerable to information that points out the inconsistencies between pagan and Christian beliefs.

Alternatively, pagan Christian identity may be formed more in terms of the stories of narrative theory in which identity is formed and defended through the stories an individual tells themselves. This narrative identity may very well be the most resilient and resistant form of spiritual identity. Changing identity requires changing the stories that individuals tell of themselves, and personal stories may be quite resistant to change.

In the light of these possible identities, Scripture describes humankind's true identity. Humankind is made in the image of God. This identity influences their awareness of truth and their understanding of knowledge. Until individuals recognize their identity in Jesus Christ, they will have created false selves. Like the prodigal son, they must come to their true selves and return to God, their Father in heaven.

Each of these approaches to identity construction, defense, and status has pastoral implications. If Christians want to minister to the pagan Christians in their midst and reach out to the pagan Christians in their communities, they need to understand how pagan Christians perceive themselves. If Christians are to help those they encounter, they must understand how a pagan Christian sense of self relates to their true self in Christ. If Christians are to help others see themselves clearly, Christians must understand the process by which pagan Christians have created their *selves*. Ultimately Christians are called to help others recognize their true selves, the persons they were created to be in Christ. Paul described this process to the Corinthians, saying, "For now we see in a

mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12). A person's true self is already known to God, and as he or she comes face to face with Jesus, he or she may see the true self as well.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

Mainline denominations face an ongoing challenge as more and more parishioners and congregants engage in beliefs outside of the Christian tradition. These beliefs often include New Age and paranormal beliefs that may be incompatible with Christian beliefs. If clergy are to respond pastorally to these individuals, they need to understand the prevalence of pagan Christian beliefs within their denominations and how those individuals who hold both pagan and Christian beliefs create or understand their spiritual identity.

This study was designed to address this question within mainline Protestant churches in the United States. The purpose of the study was to examine pagan Christian spiritual identity in the Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Lutheran churches in order to understand and respond to creeping paganism within these mainline denominations.

Research Questions and/or Hypotheses

The following research questions were designed both to measure the prevalence of pagan beliefs within mainline denomination churches and to gain a deeper understanding of the spiritual identities of individuals who hold both pagan and Christian beliefs.

Research Question #1

Do Christians in Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Baptist churches demonstrate statistical differences in the pagan beliefs they hold?

This research question was designed to measure the actual frequency of New Age, paranormal, and pagan beliefs held by members of mainline denominations. In order to assess the prevalence of these beliefs, each respondent completed a survey that included demographic information (see Appendix C), a measure of Christian orthodoxy (see Appendix D), and the pagan beliefs scale (see Appendix E). Demographic and Christian orthodoxy measures allowed the results to be categorized by denomination, while the pagan beliefs scale provided a measure of the prevalence of pagan beliefs within each denomination.

Research Question #2

What kinds of pagan beliefs do Christians in Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Lutheran churches hold?

This research question examined the kinds of New Age, paranormal, or pagan beliefs that each respondent held. Again demographic data allowed the results to be categorized by denomination and the Christian orthodoxy scale provided a measure of how invested each individual was in the Christian faith, while the pagan belief scale identified the pagan beliefs which each individual held. The answers to this question gave a measure of the types of beliefs, both Christian and pagan, that individual respondents embraced. Finally, the pile sort provided a qualitative measure of how each individual organized these beliefs in his or her own cognitive schema (see Appendix G).

Research Question #3

How do individuals reconcile incompatible Christian and pagan beliefs?

This question examined how respondents reconciled Christian and pagan beliefs. In addition to the pagan belief scale, the Short Christian Orthodoxy scale, and the pile

sort used to address the first two research questions, qualitative data from the spiritual identity interviews were also used (see Appendix J). The Short Christian Orthodoxy and the pagan belief scales identified which beliefs each respondent held and helped identify the degree of potential incompatibility of belief they might experience. The pile sort results helped indicate whether the respondents saw their Christian and pagan beliefs as incompatible or whether they were able to reconcile them into a coherent single belief system. The spiritual identity semi-structured interview questions, particularly the question, "How do you reconcile the different aspects of your faith?" provided a qualitative description of how individuals reconciled these beliefs and whether they were experiencing any cognitive dissonance in the process. The SDS-17 was used to measure the likely impact of social desirability on the responses.

Research Question #4

How do individuals who hold both Christian and pagan beliefs create a cohesive sense of spiritual identity?

The final research question was designed to explore the spiritual identities of individuals who held both Christian and pagan beliefs. The spiritual identity semi-structured interview questions were designed to explore this question in great depth, both encouraging the respondents to consider their spiritual identity while at the same time leaving room for the respondents to answer and lead the interview towards topics and areas they found important.

Population and Participants

The population for this study included all Christians within mainline denominations in the United States. The sample included members on the e-mail lists of a

representative group of mainline denominational churches. Church denominations included Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist. To increase the generalizability of the results, churches from each denomination were chosen from four different geographic locations: East Coast, Midwest, Southwest, and West Coast.

Within this larger sample, a smaller sample was selected for the second phase of the project. This smaller sample was limited to seven randomly selected members from the participant churches who also held pagan beliefs, as measured on the pagan belief scale, and who had indicated a willingness to participate in further in-depth interviews. One individual was interviewed by mail, one by e-mail, and five by phone.

The final survey sample included 163 individuals. All five denominations were represented as were all geographic regions. The average age was around 58 years. Respondents were most likely to be well-educated married women. Across the sample, PB scores ranged from six to eight, and SCO scores ranged from 25 to 42. Not all individuals completed all items, so complete scores are lacking on some individuals.

Design of the Study

This project was designed both to measure the occurrence of pagan beliefs within mainline Christian denominations and also to recognize how individuals reconcile potentially incompatible beliefs within their own spiritual identity. To answer these questions, this study required both quantitative data on the prevalence of pagan beliefs as well as more in-depth exploration of how individuals create a coherent sense of spiritual identity while holding these beliefs.

This ministry project occurred over five months from August 2012 through January 2013. The project was divided into two phases. The first phase encompassed an

online survey of the members of a representative sample of mainline denominational churches. The second phase invited fifteen individuals who held both pagan and Christian beliefs to participate in more in-depth, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. Together both phases helped delimit the depth and breadth of pagan Christian views within mainline denominations.

This project used a mixed-methods design in which quantitative data was collected followed by the gathering of more qualitative information. This type of mixed-methods design is particularly useful when trying to explain phenomena, in this case how pagan Christians create a sense of spiritual identity. The quantitative data, collected through the demographic survey, the Short Christian Orthodoxy scale, the pagan belief scale, and the SDS-17, gave a good measure of the extent of pagan beliefs within mainline denominations while the qualitative data, collected through the pile sort and the semi-structured interviews, helped explain the reason for these beliefs. Together the quantitative and qualitative data helped delineate the scope of pagan beliefs in mainline churches.

Instrumentation

This project used six different instruments: four quantitative instruments—a demographic survey, the Short Christian Orthodoxy scale, the pagan belief scale, and the SDS-17—and two qualitative instruments—the pile sort and the spiritual identity semi-structured interview protocol. Together these instruments described both the prevalence of pagan beliefs within mainline denominations and offered an in-depth view into the spiritual identities of individuals who hold both pagan and Christian views.

The demographic survey gathered basic demographic information including age, gender, education, geographic location, and quantitative data about the respondents' religious involvement. The survey included questions about how long they had been Christians, their present denomination, how long they had been in their present churches, and their regular spiritual practices. The standard demographic questions were augmented with demographic questions from the Pew Forum's 2009 Religion and Public Life Survey (20-21), including questions concerning the religion of the respondents' spouses and whether either the respondents or the spouses considered themselves to be evangelical. Together, these questions provided important quantitative information necessary to assess the prevalence of pagan beliefs within the Episcopal, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian denominations.

The SCO was used to identify the prevalence of Christian beliefs within the sample. Hunsberger developed this version of the scale (361-62) from the original version of the Christian Orthodoxy scale developed by J. Timothy Fullerton and Bruce Hunsberger (320). Comprised of six items, half of which are stated positively ("Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God") and half of which are stated negatively ("Despite what many people believe, there is no such thing as a God who is aware of our actions"), the SCO gives a measure of the degree to which an individual believes in the basic tenets of the Christian faith. A seventh item from the original Christian Orthodoxy scale ("God exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit") was included to assess belief in the Trinity. In addition respondents were given the opportunity to comment following each question on why they believed this particular item or how they practiced it within the context of their own lives (see Appendix D).

Each response of the SCO is scored as followed:

0 I *strongly disagree* with the statement
1 I *moderately disagree* with the statement
2 I *slightly disagree* with the statement
3 Neutral
4 I *slightly agree* with the statement
5 I *moderately agree* with the statement
6 I *strongly agree* with the statement

This scoring differs from the original scoring of the SCO, which scored the *disagree* statements with negative numbers. Using positive numbers simplifies analysis. Items 2, 3, and 5 were reverse scored. Final SCO scores were calculated by totaling the points for each of the individual questions, rendering a final SCO score between 0 and 42, with higher scores indicating more orthodox Christian beliefs.

The PB was used to measure the prevalence of pagan beliefs within the sample. This scale is based on eight questions from the Pew Forum's 2009 Religion and Public Life Survey (19-20). These questions were originally asked of 2003 individuals contacted by phone in August 2009. Three of the questions were also included in Gallup polls in 1990 and 1996. For the purposes of this study, a ninth question concerning the use of tarot cards and Ouija boards was added. In addition respondents were given the opportunity to comment following each question on why they believed a particular item or how they practiced it within the context of their own lives (see Appendix E). For each question on the PB, respondents were asked to select either Yes or No, depending on whether they agreed with the statement or not. Each Yes was scored as one point, with each No worth zero points. A measure of pagan belief was then calculated on the sum of these scores, with zero indicating no measured pagan beliefs and nine indicating a high level of pagan belief.

The SDS-17 was used to identify the degree to which individuals displayed a "need to please," also known as "social desirability." Social desirability, particularly in terms of image management, might influence a participant's responses on the SCO or PB. One of the most common scales for social desirability is the Marlowe-Crowne scale or one of its many short forms (Strahan and Gerbasi 192). However, in recent years concerns have been raised about the scale's reliability and validity (Barger 299; Lee 714) and whether some of the items of the scale are still up to date (Stöber 3).

Based on these concerns, Stöber has developed an updated social desirability scale, the SDS-17 (16). This scale was constructed by asking students to "write down behaviors they considered socially desirable but infrequent or socially undesirable but frequent" (3). Of this pool of questions, seventeen were found to have item correlations of greater than twenty, as well as a correlation of .74 with the existing Marlowe-Crowne scale. One question, "I have tried illegal drugs," was removed because it did not appear to correlate with the other items (12). Revalidation of the scale in the United States also found it to be a good measure of social desirability (Blake et al. 1634).

Each of the sixteen items on the SDS-17 scale is marked as either true or false. The SDS-17 is scored with each *true* statement assigned 1 and each *false* statement assigned 0. Items 1, 5, 6, 10, 14, and 16 are reversed scored. A final social desirability score is calculated by summing the scores for each individual question, with possible scores ranging from 0 to 16. Higher scores denote greater social desirability effects and indicate that the individual is attempting to manage his or her public presentation.

To gain a qualitative measure of pagan beliefs the pile sort was used. In a pile sort, respondents sort cards containing different words or phases into piles (Bernard 311).

Each pile contains items that *belong together,* and each pile is named with the underlying idea or concept. Pile sorts are advantageous because they provide a cognitive map of an individual's understanding of a particular domain. For this study a pile sort was used to describe the cognitive maps of individuals who hold both Christian and pagan beliefs.

To generate the words used in the pile sort, Google Sets was used. Given a seed word, Google Sets will generate a list of related words based on the implicit and explicit lists associated with Web pages indexed by Google. While Google Sets are no longer available as an application, they can still be accessed through Google Docs. To generate a list of possible words, the following seed words were entered: God, Christian, Jesus, salvation, astrology, witchcraft, tarot, and reincarnation. From these seeds a list of 757 possible related words were generated. A Microsoft Excel pivot table identified repeated words, and all words that appeared on at least two lists were selected. This process reduced the list to 108 possible words. The list was further reduced by removing plural words (e.g., horoscope and horoscopes), similar words (e.g., astrology and Chinese astrology), proper nouns (e.g., Buddhism, Catholic, with the exception of God and Jesus), unusual words (e.g., vastu, vastushastra), ministerial positions (e.g., pope, minister, priest), as well as common words (e.g., pets, song, family; see Appendix H for removed terms). Because of concern about the capitalization of some words (e.g., are *god* and *God* the same concept or different?), the remaining words were converted to all caps. These words were entered into the online Qualtrics card list (see Appendix G). The cards could then be sorted by the respondents into virtual piles, with each pile representing a salient semantic category for the respondent.

Pile sort data were collected through Qualtrics. Gephi was used to analyze the grouping of terms in order to identify the similarities and differences in the ways Christians and pagan Christians organized the concepts. These groupings, in turn, provided a representation of the pagan Christian worldview.

The researcher-designed semi-structured interviews used the SI protocol (see Appendix J). This protocol consisted of six open-ended questions, as well as sub-questions that were used to draw out further information on the topic. Each of the questions in the SI protocol was intentionally designed to be open-ended, as research has shown open-ended questions to be less threatening when discussing sensitive topics (Bernard 269). Furthermore, Marcia has reported that interviews are the best method for assessing identity status (557).

Pilot Test or Expert Review

The qualitative measures were reviewed by Lois Stanford, PhD, an anthropology professor and qualitative measures expert at New Mexico State University. After reviewing the terms originally proposed for inclusion, she believed that the terms mixed concepts with behavior and practices. Based on her recommendations, a second set of terms was generated, this time using Google Sets. Because these terms are used as Web page descriptors and in Web searches, they are more likely to belong to the same semantic domains.

In addition, a pilot test of the quantitative measures was done. The quantitative portions of the survey were distributed to sixteen individuals. Each individual was asked to complete the survey and to provide feedback on the survey as a whole. Based on this feedback, a number of changes were made. In order to be more even-handed in the

treating of the orthodoxy and pagan belief questions, open-ended text blocks were added after each of the orthodoxy questions, similar to the open-ended text blocks following the pagan belief questions. Concerns were also raised about the social desirability questions, which were felt to be awkward and an impediment to the flow of the survey. To address these issues, all questions in the orthodoxy, pagan belief, and social desirability sections were placed on separate pages and randomized. These changes both made the survey flow more easily and provided a more rigorous survey through the randomization of questions. The changes reduced the potential for the survey itself to influence respondents.

Following these changes a second pilot test was done. For this pilot the URL was distributed through the e-mail list of St. Andrew's Episcopal church in Las Cruces, New Mexico. Approximately forty individuals responded. This pilot test identified a problem in the logic flow of the survey that was introduced when the survey questions were randomized. The logic was corrected so that all survey questions were displayed appropriately.

Variables

Predictor variables included age, gender, education, state and length of residence, denomination, evangelical orientation, spouse denomination and evangelical orientation (if appropriate), Christian beliefs, and church participation, including frequency of attendance, length of time in present church, and Christian activities. The criterion variable was a measure of pagan beliefs. Intervening variables included social desirability, cultural heritage, and previous exposure to pagan beliefs.

The first predictor variable measured was gender. Gender was limited either to male or female. Gender was identified as an important variable to measure based on previous research that had found pagan beliefs, particularly belief in the paranormal, more prevalent in women (Aarnio and Lindeman 6; Orenstein 308; Rice 100).

Age was also measured as a predictor variable. Age was stratified into age ranges. The ranges included 17 or younger, 18-20, 21-30, 31-40, 41-50, 51-60, 61-70, 71-80, and 81+. These ranges were selected to match the age ranges used in the Pew Forum Survey. Age was deemed an important predictor variable based on previous research that had found differences in pagan beliefs based on age (Possamai, Bellamy, and Castle 21).

Some researchers also found that education has an impact upon pagan beliefs (Orenstein 308; Rice 100). However, the research results are not in agreement with Orenstein finding that high education reduced paranormal beliefs and Rice finding that higher education increased belief in the paranormal. In this study the predictor variable education was also based on the categories used in the Pew Forum Survey (10).

The existing research literature gives some indication that pagan beliefs may vary by US Region (Donahue 180). In order to assess regional influences on pagan beliefs, US state was included as a predictor variable, which was then mapped to one of four US regions: East Coast, Midwest, Southwest, and West Coast. If region influences one's pagan beliefs, then how long an individual has resided in the region gives a measure of the impact of the region upon their beliefs. Therefore, the length of residence in the state was also identified.

The length of time an individual had been a Christian was also a predictor variable. While this variable has received little attention in the literature, the length of

time a person has been a Christian might have an impact on his or her pagan beliefs as well.

Christian and pagan beliefs may be impacted by both denomination and whether individuals considered themselves evangelicals. Existing research indicates denomination does affect paranormal beliefs (Orenstein 305; Possamai, Bellamy, and Castle 17; Rice 99). Therefore, both denomination and evangelical status were considered to be predictor variables. Most individuals were expected to choose one of the five denominations included in the sample, but an individual could also enter an entirely different denomination. Evangelical status was also included in the Pew Forum study (4). Both denomination and evangelical status were expected to result in differences in Christian and pagan beliefs.

However, just because a person considers him or herself to belong to a particular denomination does not indicate that denomination is necessarily having an impact upon their beliefs. For instance, a person could have been raised as a Baptist and only became an Episcopalian a year ago. For this reason individuals identified how long the individual had belonged to their particular denomination. Therefore, length of time in denomination was also included as a predictor variable.

Similarly, a spouse's faith, particularly denomination or evangelical status, might have an impact upon a person's Christian or pagan beliefs. These were included as predictor variables. These variables were also included in the Pew Forum study (5) and provided a further mechanism to confirm the data results between the two studies.

Finally, measuring each individual's Christian beliefs and participation was important. Therefore, two measures of church participation were included. Church

participation was measured by the frequency of church attendance and the number of other Christian activities in which the individual participated.

Frequency of attendance refers to how often a person attends church. Previous research has indicated that pagan beliefs vary by church attendance (Glendinning and Bruce 412; Orenstein 305; Pew Forum 8; Possamai, Bellamy, and Castle 16). For this predictor variable each individual was asked to indicate the frequency of church attendance. This variable served as a measure of faith involvement.

However, for a number of reasons using only church attendance to measure involvement in one's faith was insufficient. For this reason individuals were also asked to indicate how many other activities in which they were engaged. The activities listed were ones that are often associated with Christian spiritual formation.

The criterion variable in this study was the pagan belief score. Existing research has indicated that pagan beliefs are impacted by these predictor variables. The predictor variables in this study were expected to have an effect on the pagan belief score. This research was designed to test this hypothesis.

Possible intervening variables were also identified. Perhaps the most significant potential intervening variable was social desirability. Social desirability refers to the need to appear *good* in the eyes of another. Within the context of this study individuals might want to appear to be *good Christians* and thereby downplay their pagan beliefs. To measure this impact, social desirability was included as an intervening variable.

A second potential intervening variable, previous exposure to pagan beliefs, either through cultural heritage or social contacts, could also influence pagan beliefs scores. To

measure at least in part their previous exposure to pagan beliefs, information was also collected on the spouse's religious participation.

Reliability and Validity

The reliability and validity of research instruments are always a concern. According to H. Russell Bernard reliability "refers to whether or not you can get the same answer by using an instrument to measure something more than once" (54). Similarly, validity "refers to the accuracy and trustworthiness of instruments, data, and findings in research" (52). Both reliability and validity are important in research.

The SCO scale is based on the Christian Orthodoxy (CO) scale of Fullerton and Hunsberger (320). While that scale was found to be valid (Fullerton and Hunsberger 324; Johnson, George, and Saine 538), the number of items was prohibitive. Because of this problem, a second scale of just six items, selected from the original scale, was created. These items were selected based on their loading on the main factor of the original Christian Orthodoxy scale. Items were selected to ensure both content variety and a balance between pro- and con-trait items. The SCO was then administered to five different samples. Cronbach's alpha was .94, and correlations with other measures strongly indicated that the SCO was indeed valid. Furthermore, the correlation between the original CO scale and the SCO was .98 (Hunsberger 361-62).

While no research has been published on the reliability or validity of the Pew Forum questions used in the PB, the responses to the questions from a sample of over two thousand individuals have been published (16). In addition, three of the questions were used in two previous Pew Forum surveys in 1990 and 1996 (9) with largely consistent responses, indicating some reliability of the measure.

Ströber has tested the SDS-17, which measures social desirability, for both reliability and validity. The SDS-17 was found to be reliable, with a Cronbach's alpha of .72 and a test-retest correlation of .82 over four weeks (3). Further research pointed to the validity of the SDS-17, with significant correlations with the Marlowe-Crowne social desirability scale (12), the Lie Scale of the revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire, and Paulhus' Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (11). Blake et al. revalidated the SDS-17 on an American sample. Once again the results indicated that the SDS-17 was both reliable and valid (1634). Together, these measures support both the reliability and validity of the SDS-17.

For the qualitative measures, including the pile sort and the SI, expert review was used to assess the reliability and validity of the instruments. After review of an original set of possible pile sort terms, Stanford expressed concern that the domain was too broad, including concepts, practices/behaviors, and/or belief systems. She recommended that the pile sort cards needed to refer to the same kind of *thing*. Based on this recommendation, a second set of pile sort terms was generated using Google Sets. This approach ensured that the terms included in the pile sort were indeed ones that existed within the same cognitive domains, as measured by the keywords of Web pages and Google searches.

Finally, validity was further ensured by controlling for personal threats, particularly social desirability. Research has indicated that participants feel less threatened when responding electronically. Not only were the quantitative measures administered electronically to reduce threat, but the qualitative measures also were conducted electronically, either in part or in whole. By conducting two-thirds of the semi-

structured interviews by mail and e-mail, both social desirability and interviewer bias were reduced, thereby increasing the validity of the qualitative measures.

Data Collection

In order to collect the data for this research, I sent requests to pastors in twenty different churches across the United States. I chose churches that were stratified across four different US regions (East Coast, Midwest, Southwest, and West Coast) and the five different Protestant denominations included in this study (Episcopalian, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist). Pastors sent out the invitation to participate (see Appendix A) to their parish or congregational e-mail lists, and I was copied to confirm distribution. Pastors also provided a count of the number of e-mails on their e-mail lists in order to calculate the actual return rate.

Congregants on the e-mail lists received the e-mail explaining the study and inviting their participation. The e-mail included a link to the Web-based survey. Clicking on this link directed individuals to the Qualtrics survey. Before beginning the instruments, individuals provided informed consent (see Appendix B). Only after consent had been given was the survey initiated.

I used Qualtrics to collect and store the data for the four quantitative instruments, including the DS (see Appendix C), the SCO (see Appendix D), the PB (see Appendix E), and SDS-17 (see Appendix F). The SCO, PB, and SDS-17 questions were randomized. Individuals could choose whether to answer any question and could stop the survey at any point. All survey data remained in Qualtrics until ready for analysis.

Qualtrics was also used for the pile sort. Upon completing the other instruments, individuals were presented with the pile sort instructions, pile sort terms, and empty

boxes into which the terms could be sorted. As with the survey data, Qualtrics stored the pile sort data until ready for analysis.

After two months I closed the surveys in Qualtrics and downloaded the data for analysis. I identified those individuals who had expressed a willingness to be interviewed and had provided contact information. I calculated SCO and PB scores and selected the individuals with the top scores in the mail, e-mail, and telephone interview sets. I then contacted these individuals for in-depth interviews. I replaced those individuals who could not be reached or who were unable or unwilling to participate with the individual with the next highest score in that particular (mail, e-mail, or phone) set.

In-depth interviews occurred over the following two months. The interviews occurred through three different modalities: mail, e-mail, and phone. Research on social desirability effects (Nederhof 272) has demonstrated that interviews conducted by mail or e-mail lessen the impact of interviewees trying to manage their "public appearance," or social desirability, although some researchers have found no difference in social desirability effects when using Web-based surveys (Hancock and Flowers 11).

For the mail interviews, each individual received an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix K), the semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix J), and a return envelope. Upon receiving the completed responses, I transcribed them into Dedoose and then filed each response in a secure location. Responses received after the two-month interview period were not included in the study.

Individuals who indicated a willingness to be interviewed by e-mail received an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix L) to be returned by e-mail. Upon my receipt of the completed informed consent, individuals received a second e-mail containing the

semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix J). I reviewed the responses and the respondents received further e-mails asking for elaboration and/or clarification as necessary. As they arrived I copied all responses into Dedoose. In addition I printed copies and filed them in a secure location. Responses received after the two-month interview period were not included in the study.

Finally, I contacted individuals who had indicated a preference to be interviewed by phone to set up an interview appointment. I informed these participants that the interviews would be taped. I began each appointment by reading the Informed Consent Form (see Appendix I) and gaining verbal consent to continue. Once I had received verbal consent, I read the first question from the SI protocol (see Appendix J) and encouraged the individual to respond. As appropriate, I requested that individuals elaborate or clarify their responses. When an individual had adequately addressed a question, I read the next question of the protocol until I had asked all the questions. Once completed, I transcribed each interview and entered the transcription into Dedoose for analysis. I completed the phone interviews within a two-month period, and no further data was collected after the two months had elapsed.

Data Analysis

I began the quantitative data analysis by examining the frequency distributions of all the data. Using SAS, outlying data points in the DS, SCO, PB, and SDS-17 were identified and addressed as necessary. I calculated the reliability of the survey items. I then computed the correlations among all variables and identified significant correlations. In addition, I compared the results with those reported in the literature.

To analyze the pile sort data, I used Microsoft Excel. The correlations between pairs of cards were calculated. Cards with significant correlations were grouped together.

I used Dedoose to analyze the semi-structured interviews. I loaded each interview into Dedoose and evaluated the interview for possible themes. Based on these themes, I developed a code table of common themes. I then reread each interview and assigned the codes as appropriate. Based on these codings, I used the Dedoose theory builder to describe the different ways in which pagan Christians create and articulate their spiritual identities. Finally, I compared the quantitative results with the qualitative themes in an effort to identify possible congruence or dissonance between the quantitative and qualitative data.

Ethical Procedures

Each phase of the study required informed consent from every participant. In the first phase, I gathered the informed consent as part of the Qualtrics online survey process (see Appendix B). In a similar manner, the second phase of the study also required informed consent. Since this phase could be completed by mail, e-mail, or phone, I either mailed, e-mailed, or read the consent form to the interviewee. Because of the different protocols, the semi-structured interviews used separate consent forms (see Appendixes I, K, and L). I kept all consent forms on file until six months after the completion of the study.

To protect respondents, I collected identifying information only for those individuals who agreed to participate in the semi-structured interviews. To ensure confidentiality, I stored identifying information separately from both the quantitative survey data and the qualitative interview transcripts. I linked an individual's survey data

with his or her corresponding interview transcript through an assigned numeric identifier. In addition, I assured respondents that no personally identifying information would be disseminated.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Problem and Purpose

Individuals in mainline Protestant churches increasingly hold both Christian and New Age or paranormal beliefs. To respond effectively to this changing landscape of belief, pastors need to understand both the prevalence of these beliefs, as well as how and why individuals in their congregations and their communities create a spiritual identity that encompasses both Christian and New Age or paranormal beliefs. As clergy understand the reasons and motivations of these individuals, they can respond pastorally.

This study was designed to help pastors in this process. The purpose of this research was to examine the prevalence of pagan beliefs within mainline denominations and to understand the spiritual identities of individuals who hold both Christian and New Age or paranormal beliefs.

Participants

For the first phase of this study thirteen churches agreed to participate. In total, 163 church members began the survey. Two individuals chose not to consent to participate, and nineteen individuals failed to complete the survey, although many of these completed all but the pile sort. Out of the 163 responses, 144 individuals completed the entire survey. Because responses were not required on any of the questionnaire items, many of the item response totals are less than 144.

Table 4.1. Demographics of the Respondents (N=163)

Characteristic	n	%	Church Attendance	n	%
Gender			More than once a week	36	22.1
Female	87	53.4	Once a week	90	55.2
Male	51	31.3	Once a month	15	9.2
Did not answer	25	15.3	Once every few months	7	4.3
Marital Status			Once or twice a year	2	1.2
Single	22	13.5	Less than once a year	3	1.8
Married	102	62.6	Never	1	.6
Separated/Divorced	18	11.0	Did not answer	9	5.5
Widowed	11	6.7	Spiritual Practices		
Did not answer	10	6.1	Bible Study	62	38.0
Education			Worship	127	77.9
High School or GED	5	3.1	Prayer	128	78.5
Some college	23	14.1	Service	112	68.7
4-year college degree	43	26.4	Leadership	67	41.1
Graduate degree	83	50.9	Tithing	78	47.9
Did not answer	9	5.5	Outreach	54	33.1
			Other	37	22.7

Respondents to the survey included eighty-seven women and fifty-one men, with twenty-five unknowns. Respondents' ages ranged from 26 to 93, with a mean age of 58 years. Twenty respondents chose not to identify their age (see Figure 4.1). In terms of marital status, twenty-two of the respondents were single, 102 were married, eighteen divorced, eleven widowed, and the remaining ten chose not to identify their marital status. In terms of education, five had completed high school, twenty-three had some college, forty-three had completed college, and eighty-three had graduate degrees. Nine individuals chose not to identify their educational level. Respondents spanned the continental United States, including Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Minnesota, Nevada,

New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Virginia, and Washington. Respondents represented all the major mainline Protestant denominations, including Baptist (n=4), Episcopal (n=79), Lutheran (n=21), Methodist (n=20), and Presbyterian (n=17). Respondents also reported Roman Catholic, United Church of Christ, and Unitarian Universalist denominations. In addition, one individual identified their denomination as Jewish, and a second individual described being a member of the Native American Church (see Table 4.2).

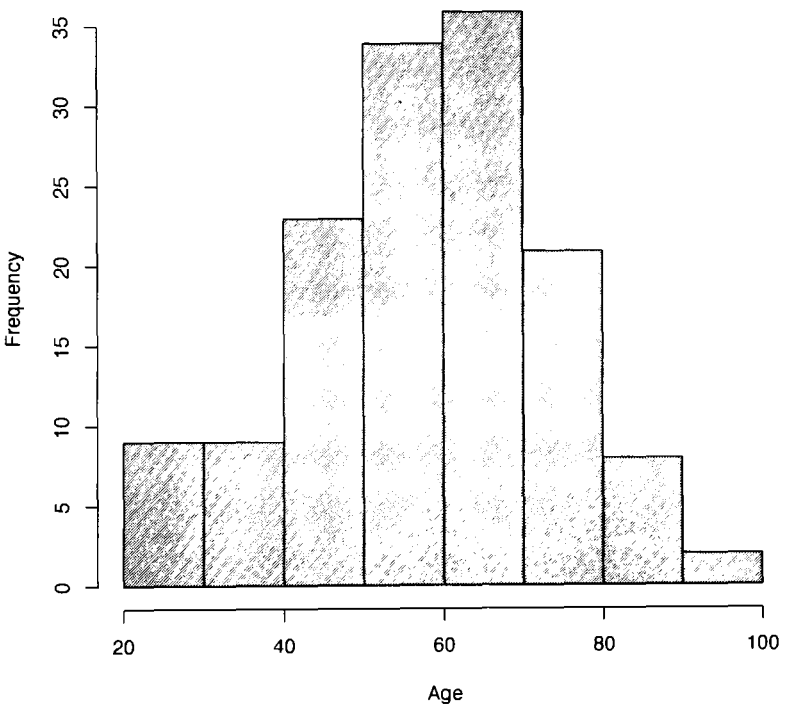

Figure 4.1. Ages of the respondents.

Table 4.2. Respondents by Denomination and State (N=151)

State	Denomination						
	Baptist	Episcopalian	Lutheran	Methodist	Presbyterian	Other	Total
Colorado		3				1	4
Florida		1					1
Maryland					9		9
Minnesota		12	1				13
Nevada			1				1
New Mexico	4	49	17	6	8	8	92
New York				14			14
Oklahoma		1					1
Oregon		13				1	14
Virginia			1				1
Washington			1				1
Total	4	79	21	20	17	10	151

In terms of their faith, all but seven individuals identified themselves as Christian. Respondents reported having been Christians from three to eighty-six years, with a mean of fifty-one years (see Figure 4.2). Individuals had belonged to their present denominations between one and eighty-six years, with a mean of thirty-two years (see Figure 4.3). Finally, respondents had been members of their present churches between one and ninety-three years, with a mean of thirteen years (see Figure 4.4). Together, these demographics paint a picture of a slightly older sample, spread both geographically and denominationally.

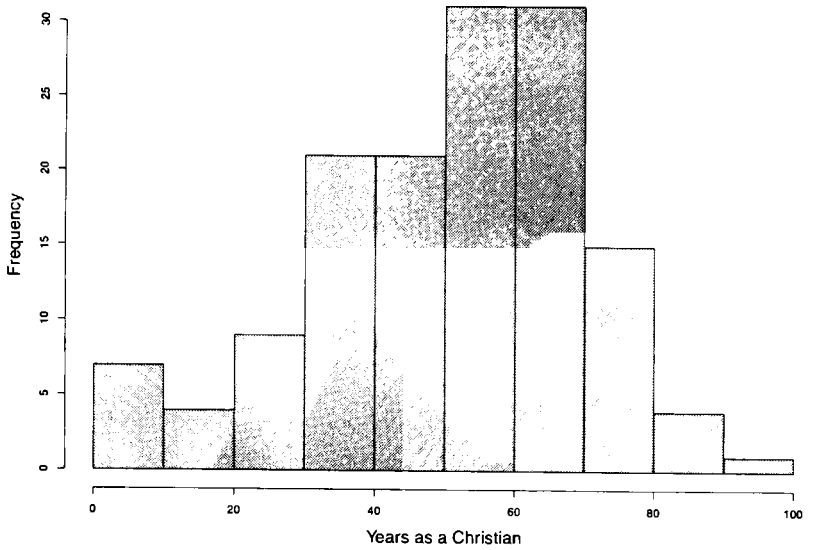

Figure 4.2. Number of years respondents had been Christians.

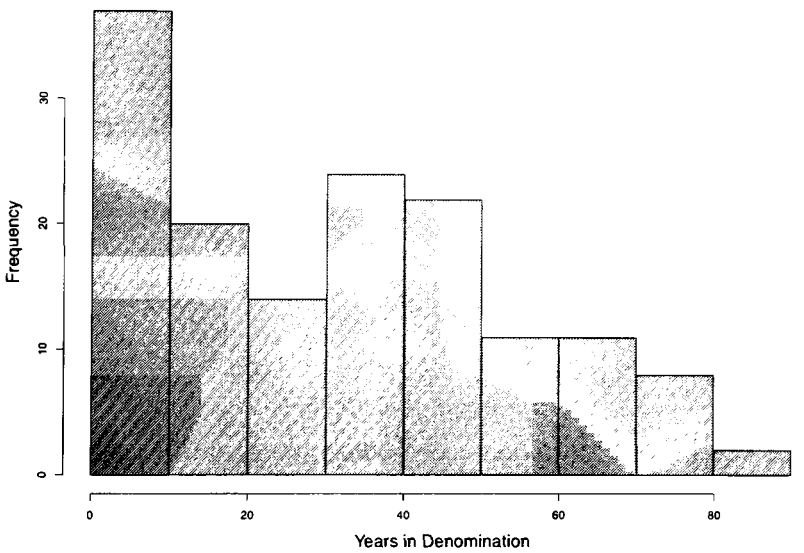

Figure 4.3. Number of years respondents had belonged to their denominations.

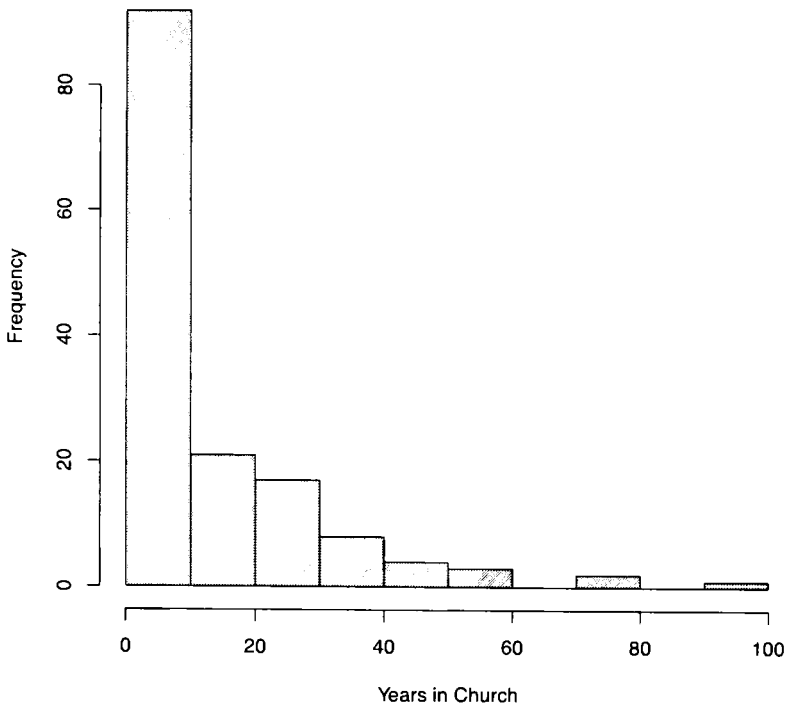

Figure 4.4. Number of years respondents had attended their local churches.

Spiritual practices varied by respondent as well. For instance, thirty-six individuals attended church more than once a week, ninety attended weekly, while fifteen attended once a month, seven attended once every few years, two attended once or twice a year, and three attended less than once a year. Interestingly, one individual reported never attending church. Of the respondents, 127 reported worship as an important part of their spiritual practices. Even more found prayer important, with 128 individuals indicating prayer as a significant spiritual practice in their lives. In addition, seventy-eight listed tithing as important, sixty-seven identified service, sixty-two included Bible study as part of their regular practices, and fifty-four participated in outreach. Other practices, identified by thirty-seven individuals, included music (e.g., choir, handbells), meditation, fellowship, spiritual direction, pastoral care, and continuing education, such as seminary classes. One person also indicated participating in peyote meetings, involving prayer and

the smoking of peyote through the night. The mean number of practices per respondent across the sample was four (see Figure 4.5).

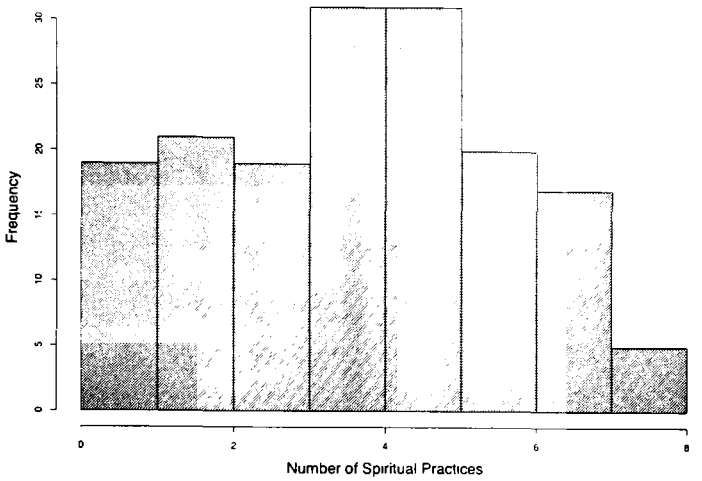

Figure 4.5. Number of spiritual practices reported by respondents.

For the second phase of the project, seven individuals with the highest combined SCO and PB scores were interviewed. Six of the interviewees were women and one was a man. Five individuals were interviewed by phone, and another two interviewed by e-mail. Neither of the two e-mail interviews was completed by the end study, and the responses were not included. All of the interviewees were associated with Episcopal churches; most were members. Their PB scores ranged from six to eight (on a nine-point scale), and their Christian orthodoxy scores ranged from 25 to 42 (on a 42-point scale). All of the interviewees indicated significant New Age and paranormal beliefs alongside their Christian beliefs.

The interviewees described two different faith journeys. Some individuals had been raised in the church, had never left the church, but also held significant New Age

and paranormal beliefs, particularly in the power and efficacy of psychics. These individuals tended to follow more than one spiritual tradition at the same time, in parallel. This group is described as the *supernatural explainers* within the context of this research.

Other individuals described a spiritual journey characterized by spiritual seeking, in which they had participated in several different belief systems, including both Christian churches and New Age groups. The number of different faiths they had experienced ranged from three to twelve and included Christian (Episcopal, Presbyterian, Baptist, Catholic, charismatic Christian, and congregational churches), Judaism, Church of Latter Day Saints, Unitarian Church, Christian Science, Church of Religious Science, Buddhism, Kabbalah, Unity Church, and other New Age groups. These individuals tended to follow different spiritual traditions one after another, serially, in contrast to the parallelism of the supernatural explainers. For the most part, these individuals were actively involved with only one spiritual tradition at a time, although some reported intermittent simultaneous involvement in more than one group. These individuals experienced periods when they definitely did not consider themselves Christians. Interestingly, these individuals tended to have higher SCO scores than the supernatural explainers who had never belonged to a different spiritual tradition. This group will be identified as the *spiritual seekers*.

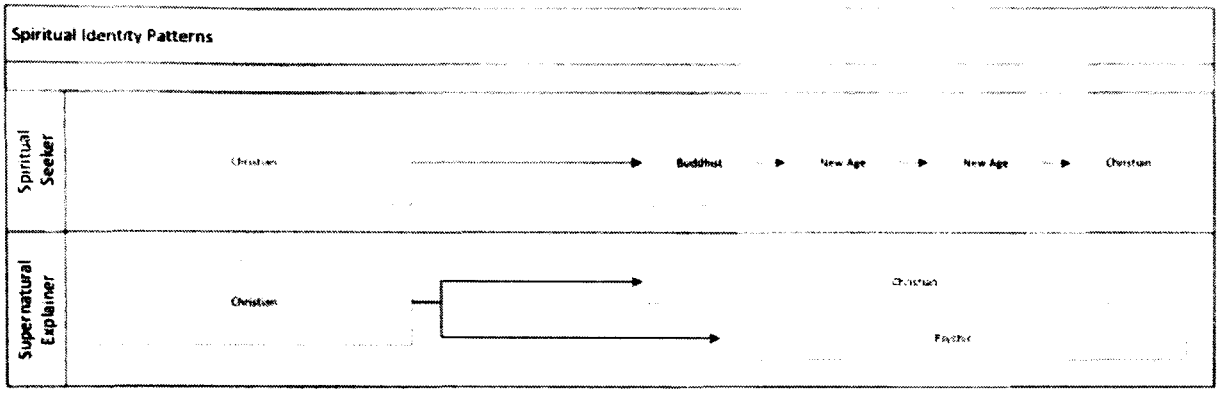

Figure 4.6. Typical spiritual journeys of spiritual seekers versus supernatural explainers.

Research Question #1

Do Christians in Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and Baptist churches demonstrate statistical differences in the pagan beliefs they hold? This question examined whether pagan beliefs vary by denomination and some of the correlates of those beliefs. Because of the small number of Baptists who responded, Baptists were removed from all denominational analyses.

Across all denominations, the mean PB score was 2.2, on a scale of zero to nine, where a higher score indicated greater pagan beliefs. The standard deviation was 2.1 (see Figure 4.7). The mean Christian orthodoxy score across all denominations was 34.4, with a range of zero to 42, and a standard deviation of 9.1. Again, higher scores indicated greater Christian beliefs (see Figure 4.8).

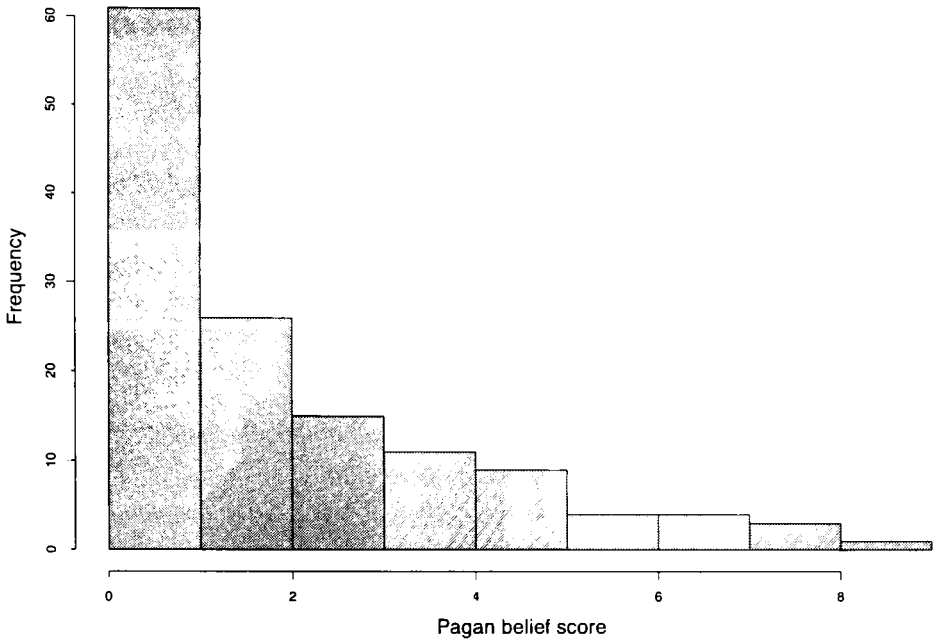

Figure 4.7. Distribution of the pagan belief scale scores.

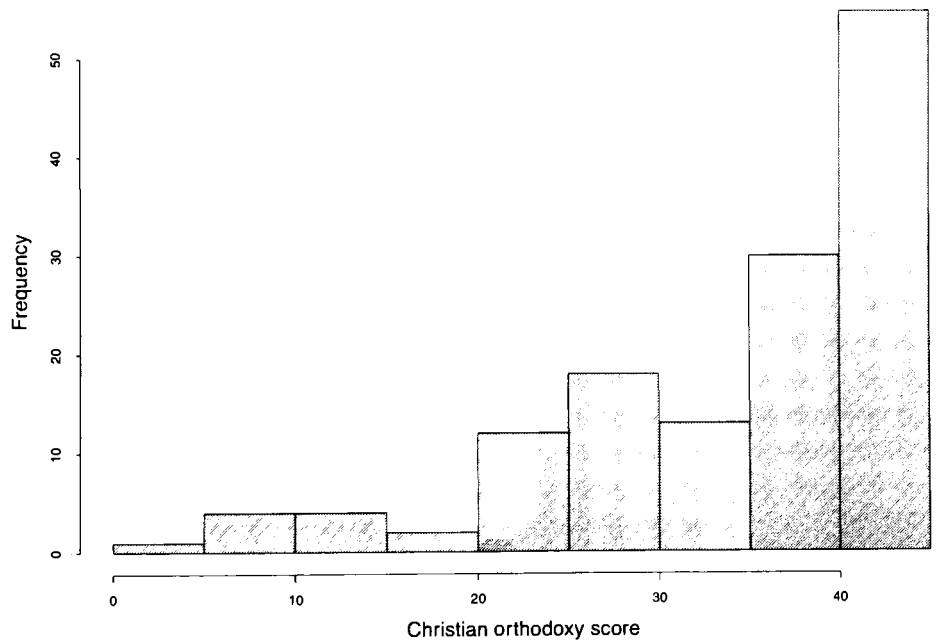

Figure 4.8. Distribution of Christian orthodoxy scores.

Both Christian orthodoxy and pagan belief scores varied by denomination. Mean Christian orthodoxy scores for the sampled denominations ranged from a high of 40.6 to

a low of 32.9, with a possible low score of zero, indicating no Christian beliefs, and a high score of 42. Individuals belonging to an *other* denomination had the lowest mean Christian orthodoxy score at 25.7. Within this study, Presbyterians indicated the highest orthodoxy, followed by Methodists and Lutherans. Episcopalians had the lowest Christian orthodoxy scores, with only the *others* having a lower mean score. The mean Christian orthodoxy scores of both Episcopalians and Lutherans were below the overall mean for all respondents (see Figure 4.9).

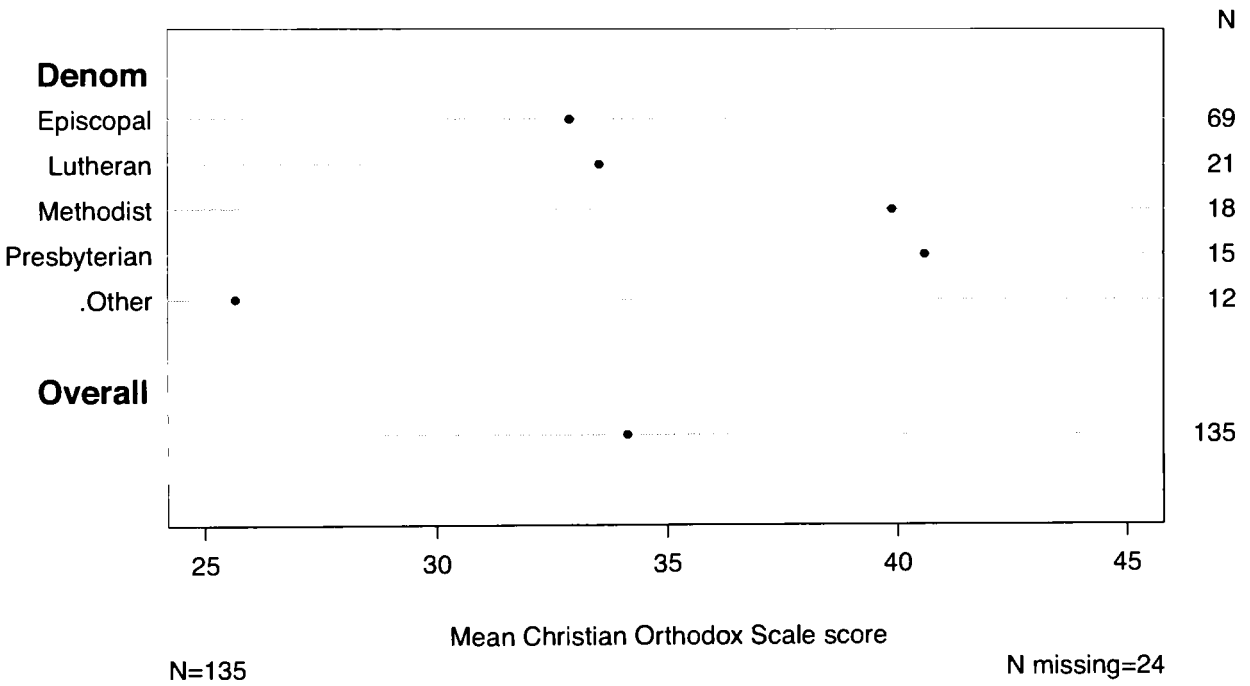

Figure 4.9. Mean Christian orthodoxy scale score by denomination (N=135).

Pagan belief scores showed a similar pattern. Mean pagan beliefs scores ranged from a low of .75 to a high of 2.8. Presbyterians had the lowest mean pagan belief score, again followed by the Methodists and Lutherans. Among the sampled denominations, Episcopalians had the highest mean pagan belief score at 2.8. Individuals who indicated

that they belonged to an *other* denomination had the highest mean pagan belief score, at 4.0. The mean pagan belief score for Episcopalians was above the overall mean pagan belief score (see Figure 4.10).

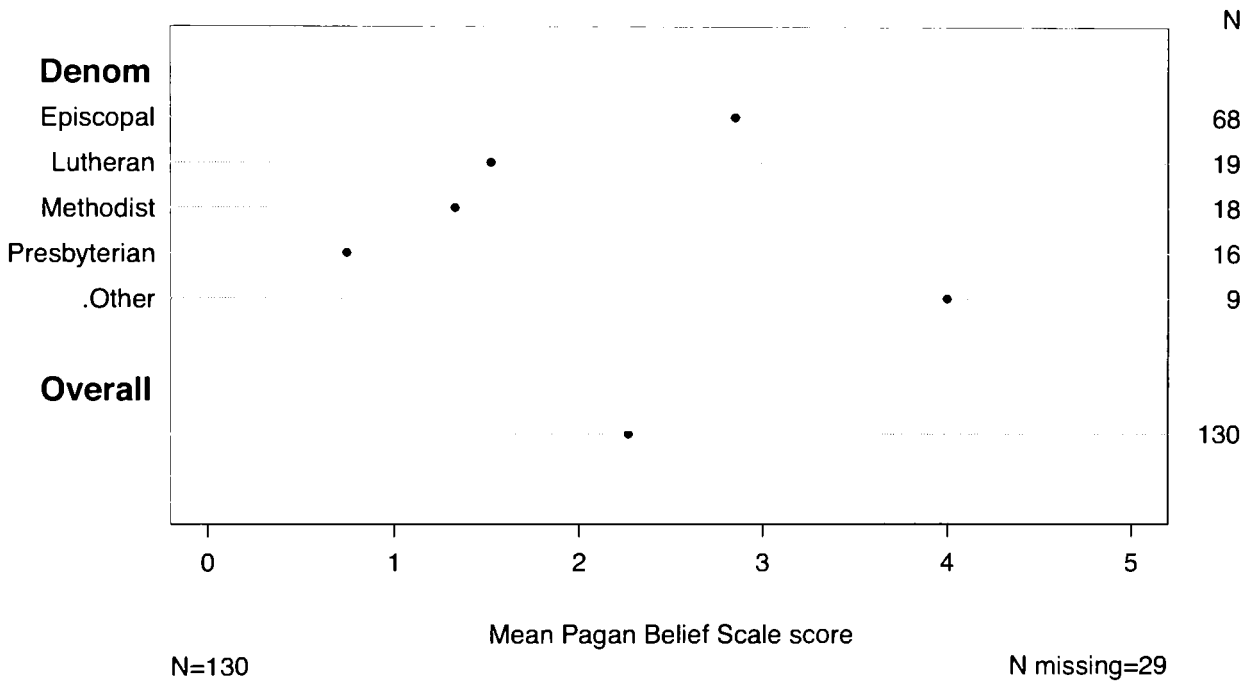

Figure 4.10. Mean PB score by denomination (N=130).

The difference among denominations was analyzed using an ANOVA. Based on the 134 completed PB responses, pagan belief scores differed significantly by denomination ($p < .0001$). In other words, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, and Presbyterians report significant differences in their New Age and paranormal beliefs (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. ANOVA of Pagan Belief Scale Scores by Denomination (N=134)

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	PR > F
Model	5	129.1329	25.8266	6.68	<.0001
Error	128	495.0162	3.8673		
Corrected Total	133	624.1492			

Further statistical analysis did not find any significant relationship between pagan belief scores and age, education, evangelical status, state of residence, whether a spouse was a Christian or not, or the number of years a person had been a member of their denomination. Several variables were found to be statistically significant. For instance, a significant difference existed in pagan belief scores by gender ($p < .01$), marital status ($p < .05$), and the number of years an individual had been a Christian ($p < .05$). However while statistically significant, these differences may not be meaningful. For instance, women have a mean PB score of 2.6, and men a mean PB score of 1.6. While statistically significant, the difference of a single question may not have meaning. Similarly, single individuals have a mean PB score of 3.4, while married individuals only have a mean score of 1.9. Finally, the mean PB score for a new Christian hovers around 3, while the mean score for an individual who has been a Christian for eighty years is closer to 2.5. While PB scores drop the longer a person has been a Christian, the small amount of change over eighty years is probably not particularly meaningful.

Given these scores, a relationship may exist between Christian orthodoxy and pagan belief scores. In other words, pagan belief scores may change as the Christian orthodoxy scores increase. To discover if this relationship existed, the Christian orthodoxy scores and the pagan belief scores were analyzed for correlations. A

significant correlation was found ($p < .01$), with a correlation coefficient of .21, indicating that the correlation was not strongly linear. Pagan belief scores decrease as Christian orthodoxy scores increase (see Figure 4.11).

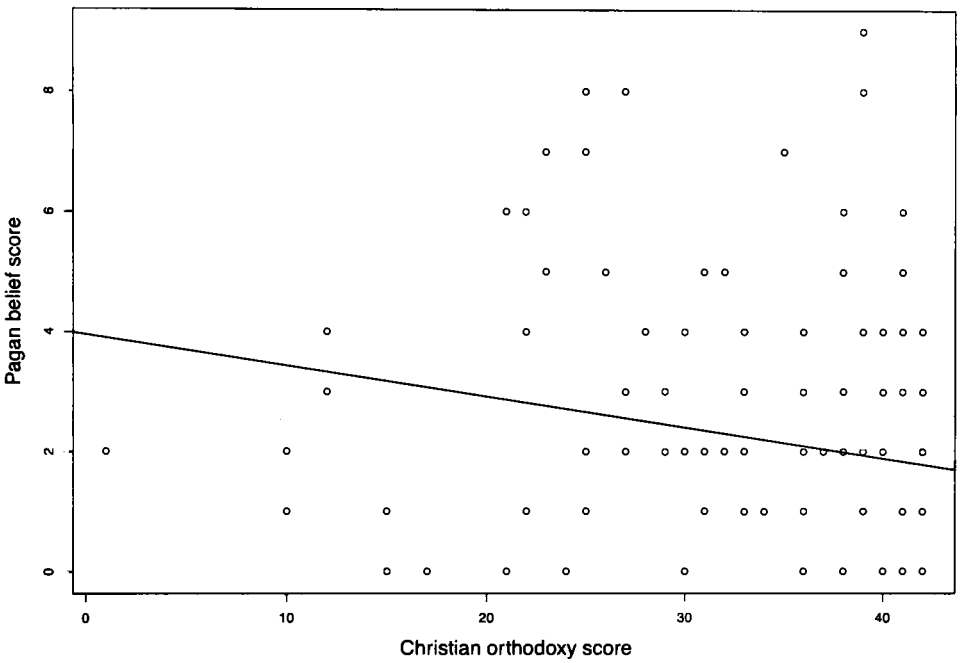

Figure 4.11. Pagan belief scores by Christian orthodoxy scores (N=126).

Since the data revealed a relationship between pagan beliefs scores and both denomination and Christian orthodoxy scores, further analyses were executed to determine which had the greater impact. A second ANOVA was computed. Again, denominational affiliation accounted for the bulk of variance ($p < .0002$) with the SCO scores explaining very little once denominational effects were taken into account (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4. ANOVA of Pagan Belief Scale Scores by Denomination and SCO Score (N=126)

Source	DF	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	F Value	PR > F
Denomination	5	100.1478458	20.0295692	5.19	0.0002
SCO score	1	0.2942145	0.2942145	0.08	0.7829

Finally, social desirability scores were also calculated for each individual. The mean social desirability score was 6.6, on a scale of 16, where higher scores indicate an increased tendency to social desirability. Social desirability scores did differ by denomination; however, these differences were not statistically significant. Social desirability scores were also not significant when compared either to Christian orthodoxy scores or pagan belief scores. These results indicate that social desirability did not play a significant role in the results of this study (see Figure 4.12).

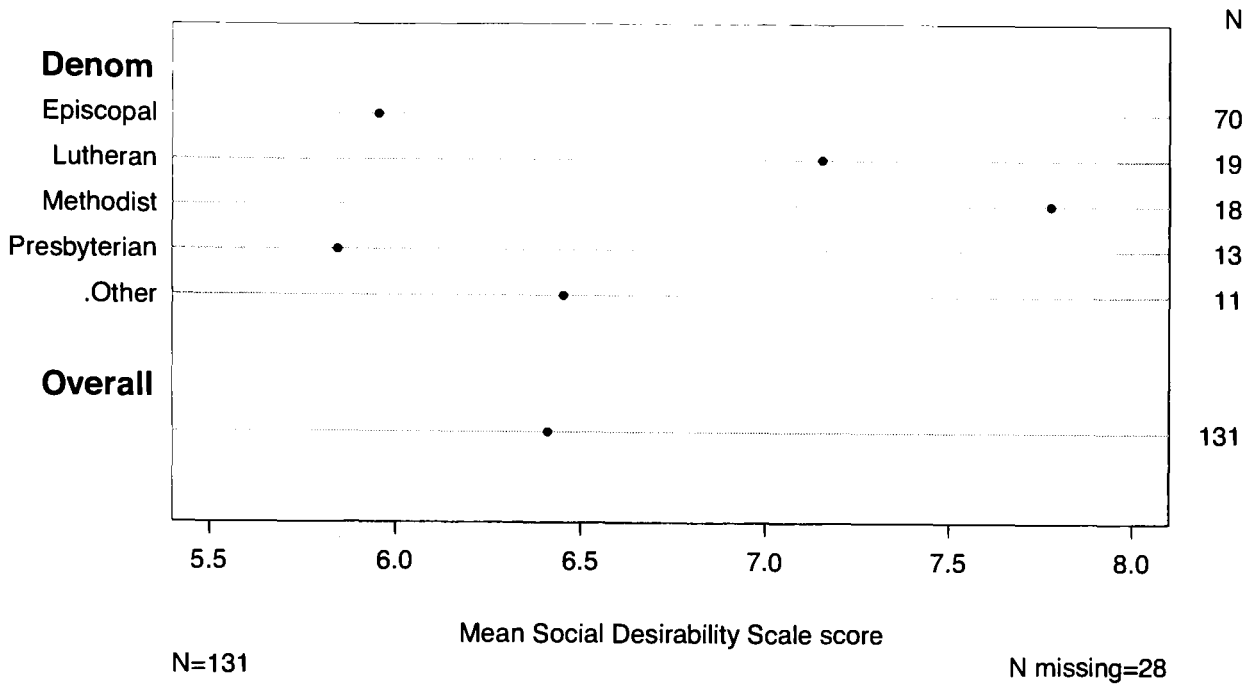

Figure 4.12. Mean social desirability score by denomination (N=131).

Taken together, these results indicate that pagan beliefs do differ by denomination, with Episcopalians holding the most pagan beliefs and Presbyterians the fewest. In addition, pagan beliefs appear to increase as Christian orthodoxy decreases. Finally, social desirability does not affect either pagan or Christian orthodoxy beliefs.

Research Question #2

What kinds of pagan beliefs do Christians in Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Lutheran churches hold? Given the prevalence of pagan beliefs in mainline denominations, the contents of those beliefs were examined to determine if they vary between denominations. Again, because of the small sample size, Baptists were eliminated from this portion of the analysis.

Differences in beliefs among denominations were examined in three different ways: through the individual pagan belief scale items, through the open text responses

describing how an individual practiced any given New Age or paranormal item, and through the pile sort. On most of the individual pagan belief scale questions, Episcopalians scored the highest, while Presbyterians scored the lowest. Two notable exceptions existed. Presbyterians were more likely than members of other denominations to believe in curses. In addition, a greater percentage of Presbyterians (23.5 percent) had visited a psychic than had Methodists (10.0 percent) or Lutherans (14.3 percent), although this percentage was still less than the Episcopalians (32.9 percent). In general, however, Episcopalians had the highest percentage of respondents agreeing with each PB item (see Table 4.5).

Table 4.5. Percentage of Respondents by Denomination Who Answered *Yes* to Each PB Item

PB Item	Denomination			
	Episcopalian %	Lutheran %	Methodist %	Presbyterian %
Believe in the *evil eye* or that people can cast curses or spells	7.6	0.0	5.0	17.6
Have consulted a fortune-teller or psychic	32.9	14.3	10.0	23.5
Believe tarot cards or a Ouija board can reveal hidden information	24.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Have seen or been in the presence of a ghost	31.6	4.8	20.0	11.8
Believe in reincarnation	25.3	14.3	5.0	5.9
Believe in astrology	20.3	14.3	10.0	5.9
Have felt that they were in touch with someone who had already died	53.2	23.8	40.0	23.5
Believe in yoga, not just as exercise, but as a spiritual practice	38.0	38.1	5.0	11.8
Believe in spiritual energy located in mountains, trees, or crystals	51.9	33.3	25.0	5.9

Some of these differences between denominational responses to individual PB items are statistically significant. For instance, using an ANOVA, the differences in denominational responses to the use of tarot cards and Ouija boards are significant at the $p < .001$ level. Similarly, denominational beliefs in spiritual energy being located in mountains, trees, or crystals is also statistically significant ($p < .001$) with more than half of Episcopalians (51.9 percent) holding this belief but only 5.9 percent of Presbyterians. While not as great, statistically significant differences can also be found among denominations in the belief in yoga as a spiritual practice ($p < .01$), use of psychics ($p < .01$), belief in ghosts ($p < .05$), and communication with the dead ($p < .05$). Differences among denominations in the belief in reincarnation were only slightly significant ($p <$

.10). No significant differences existed among denominations in the belief in astrology or belief in curses and spells (see Figure 4.13).

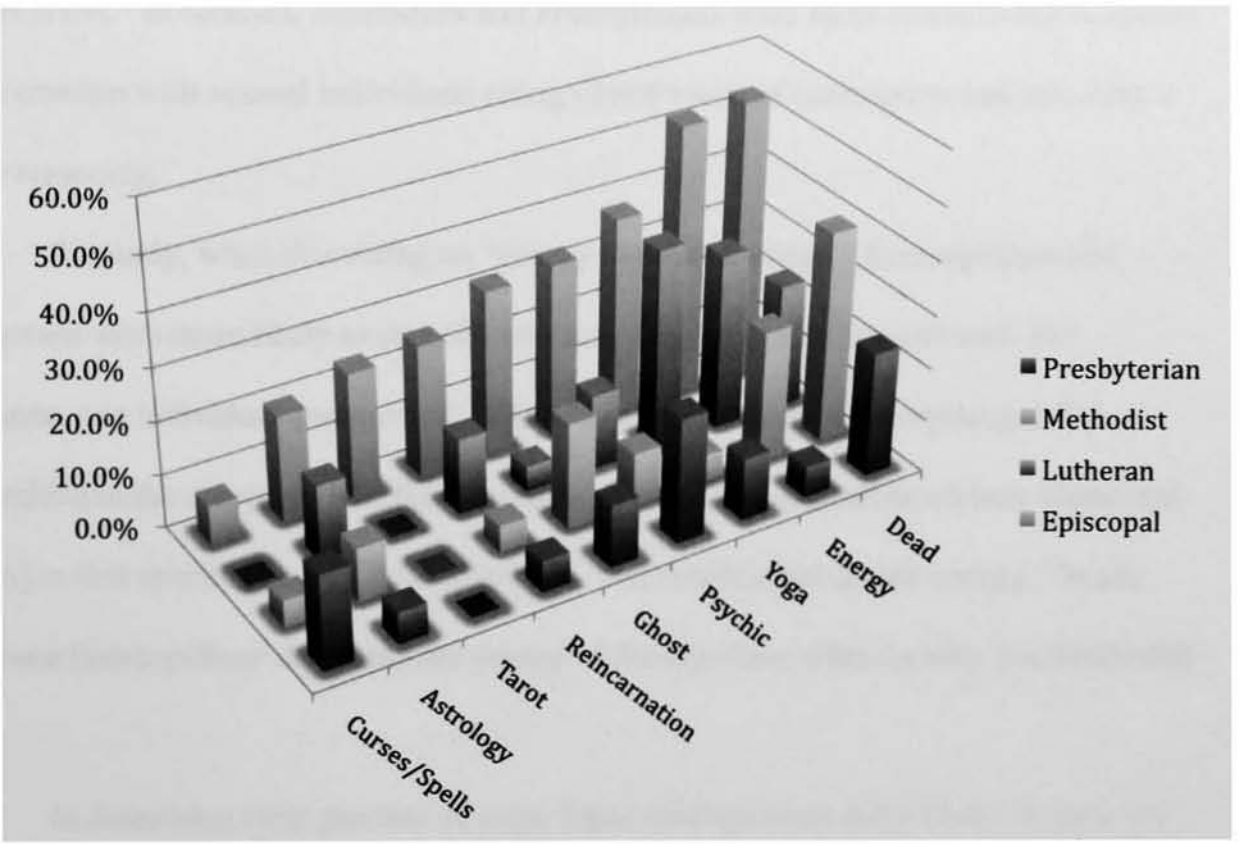

Figure 4.13. Percentage of respondents by denomination who answered each PB item positively.

A second method of looking at the differences in New Age and paranormal beliefs between denominations could be found in the open responses following each of the PB items, in which respondents were invited to describe why they believed or how they practiced each item. Common themes that appeared in multiple responses were identified, and the occurrences of these themes among denominations were then compared.

For instance, Episcopalians and Lutherans often talked about reincarnation as an opportunity to "learn lessons." More than one individual described reincarnation as a chance "to get it right." Another individual commented that "you are reborn until you figure it out." In contrast, Methodists and Presbyterians were more likely to argue against reincarnation with several individuals citing Christ's acts of redemption and salvation in their reasoning.

Similarly, when discussing an "energy located in things," Episcopalians and Lutherans were more likely to describe an energy that pervades the universe. For instance, one individual commented, "There's spiritual energy in everything. I feel embedded in the energy of life, that feeling is more or less depending on how connected [I am] to that spiritual energy." Another said, "All creation has divine energy." In all, fourteen Episcopalians discussed the energy of the universe, whereas only one Methodist did.

In describing their practice of yoga, Episcopalians were more likely to focus on two themes, including connectivity and meditation or prayer. Episcopalians were more likely to describe the whole universe as connected. For instance, one commented, "Yoga is the connection between me and the rhythm of my universe." In contrast, only one Methodist spoke explicitly about the connectedness of the universe.

Episcopalians were also more likely to describe their practice of yoga in terms of either meditation or prayer. One person commented, "[Y]oga grounds me in breathing and becomes a form of prayer." Another person described yoga as a form of meditation, saying, "It is a meditation which provides us with insight into ourselves, and can provide a way for God to connect with us … or us to connect with God." Only one person

referenced Jesus, and then only indirectly, in their description of yoga: "I ... would meditate on the Lord and center myself through communing with God, not Buddha or whatever." No Methodists or Presbyterians considered yoga to be a form of either meditation or prayer.

When talking about astrology, both Episcopalians and Lutherans mentioned amusement. One person summed up this attitude, saying, "Its [sic] kinda fun though, isn't it?" However, none of these individuals indicated they actually believed their horoscopes. In contrast, Presbyterians and Methodists never mentioned amusement in their descriptions of astrology.

Episcopalians were much more likely to believe that they had been contacted by someone who had died. Episcopalians were also more likely to describe this contact as occurring in dreams. Lutherans and Presbyterians also reported dream contact with the dead but at a reduced rate when compared with Episcopalians.

When speaking of fortune tellers or psychics, Episcopalians were again more likely to describe the interaction in terms of amusement or experimentation. One described it as "a group of silly teenagers who visited a fortune teller." More than one individual commented that they did it "just for fun." In contrast, Methodists and Presbyterians never wrote in terms of either amusement or experimentation.

The pile sort data provided a third means of evaluating the differences in beliefs among denominations. Individuals within all of the denominations tended to group the terms into two major groups: Christian beliefs and New Age or paranormal beliefs. However, denominations varied in how clearly they differentiated between the two groups. For instance, Presbyterians grouped together the terms *palmistry*, *crystals*, *magic*,

tarot, *numerology*, *paranormal*, *witchcraft*, *hypnosis*, *ghosts*, *karma*, *horoscope*, *psychic*, *astrology*, *New Age*, and *reincarnation*. Episcopalians grouped the exact same terms together. However, the interconnectedness of the terms *karma* and *reincarnation* was different, with both *karma* and *reincarnation* grouped together with the New Age and paranormal terms, but drawn out towards the Christian terms, particularly *meditation*, *spirituality*, and *angels*. Presbyterians demonstrate this pattern in reverse: *Karma* and *reincarnation* are grouped with the New Age and paranormal terms, while *meditation*, *spirituality*, and *angels* are grouped with the Christian terms, but drawn towards the New Age and paranormal terms (see Figures 4.14 and 4.15).

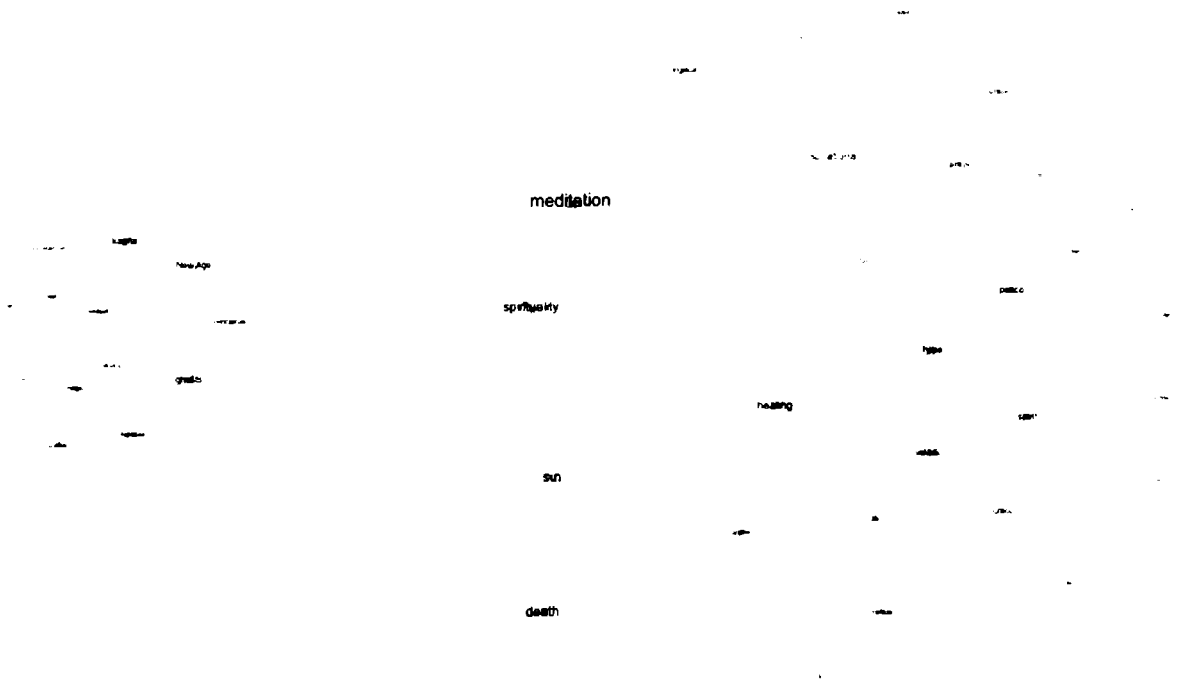

Figure 4.14. Groupings of the pile sort terms by Presbyterian respondents.

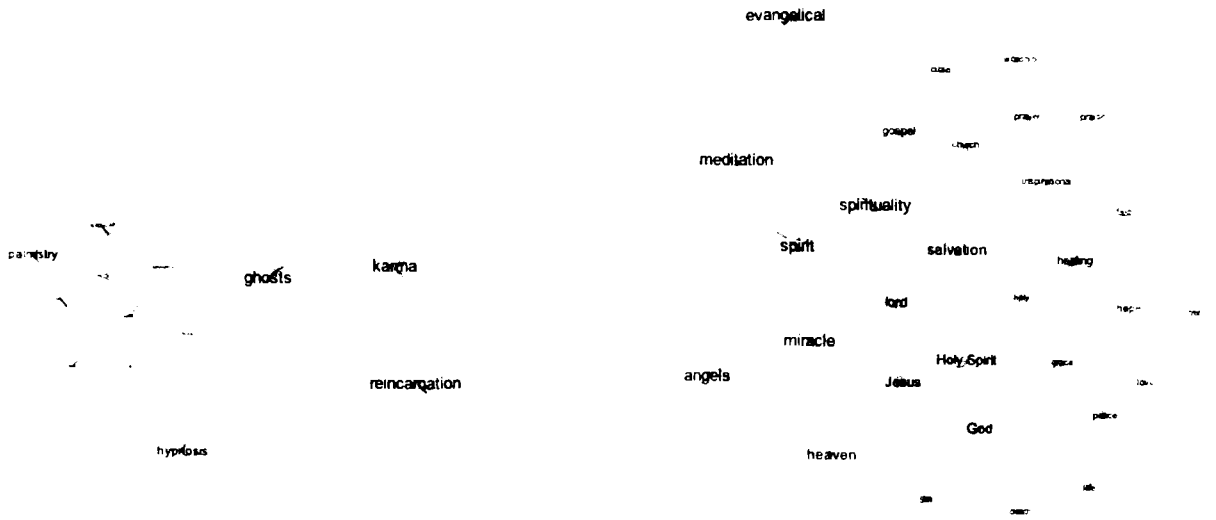

Figure 4.15. Groupings of the pile sort terms by Episcopalian respondents.

The difference, then, between the Presbyterians and the Episcopalians was not in how they grouped the terms but in how tightly the two groups were clustered together. For the Episcopalians, and to a lesser degree the Lutherans, both *reincarnation* and *karma* emerged from the New Age and paranormal group towards the Christian cluster. For Episcopalians, and to a lesser degree Lutherans, both *reincarnation* and *karma* were increasingly seen as related to Christian terms. Similarly, for Methodists and Presbyterians, the terms *angels*, *spirituality*, and *meditation*, while still seen as Christian terms, were more closely related to the New Age and paranormal terms.

Research Question #3

How do individuals reconcile incompatible Christian and pagan beliefs? For the most part interviewees described no conflict or tension between their Christian and New Age or paranormal beliefs. Others described conflict but only when in community. When alone with God, they experienced no conflict in their beliefs.

Indeed some thought that New Age beliefs, such as reincarnation, could be found within the Bible as well. For instance, one commented, "I think that the Bible makes a lot of references to things that are kind of like reincarnation a little bit." While their beliefs would not be considered conventional, they were able to find biblical support that rendered their New Age beliefs compatible with their Christian beliefs.

Both biblical and doctrinal interpretations were generally seen as residing with the individual. For instance evangelical beliefs, such as the belief in hell, were discounted. One interviewee commented, in describing an individual approach to Bible interpretation, "[Y]ou choose a passage out of the Bible and you can look at it from so many different perspectives." Others redefined terms, such as *salvation*, in ways that made sense to them but were not aligned with either biblical or the historical orthodox definitions. For instance, salvation was redefined in personal terms:

> It's a matter of day after day, week after week, month after month whatever you do gives you an opportunity to say to yourself, "Now was that the best thing I could have done in that situation?" And then,... you know, to kind of ask myself, "OK, so it,...well you thought it was the best, was there anything you would do different if you had to do it over again?" And sometimes the answer would be "No" and sometimes the answer would be "Yes," and if the answer was "Yes" then what would that be? So I guess that kind of questioning where you just keep drilling down and drilling down and so for me that's what being saved is about. It's about always inquiring. Always inquiring of myself. Whether it's conscious inquiry or a subconscious inquiry.

By locating both biblical and doctrinal authority within the individual, conflict and tension between beliefs were eliminated or at least seriously reduced.

Some interviewees did mention limited conflict in regards to certain aspects of their faith. One approach to resolving this conflict was simply to let it be and to live in

the midst of conflict. For instance, one interviewee described living within this ambiguity:

> If there's something in the Creed or the Eucharist or in the liturgy that doesn't work for me, then I just say, "Then I'm going to read this passage from the Bible cause it's the reading for today, but it doesn't make any sense to me." And that's OK. Maybe someday it will.

These individuals recognized the potential conflict but chose to live in the midst of that tension.

Finally, several interviewees mentioned the freedom of belief that they experienced within the Episcopal Church. One commented, "[T]hat's something I like about the Episcopal Church in particular, that it allows a certain freedom of thought and slightly different approaches to what we believe." Another commented, "As an Episcopalian, they like to say you don't have to leave your brain at the door." This freedom reduced or removed any conflict between individual beliefs and the beliefs of the church.

Research Question #4

How do individuals who hold both Christian and pagan beliefs create a cohesive sense of spiritual identity? Respondents varied in their spiritual identities. The supernatural explainers, for instance, maintained a Christian identity that spanned their lives. The spiritual seekers not only did not have a single spiritual identity that spanned their lifetime, but some continued to be unclear about their spiritual identity even at the time of the interview.

In general, the spiritual seekers struggled to name their spiritual identity. One described herself as an "Episcopalian Buddhist," another as a "child of God." Some identified themselves as *primarily* Christian but acknowledged that they did not, in fact,

fit within any particular religion. The spiritual seekers' identities were fluid, and some acknowledged that their spiritual identities continued to evolve.

Most of the spiritual seekers agreed, however, that they would not describe themselves as simply *Christian*. While many could identify themselves denominationally, as in "I am an Episcopalian," they struggled to call themselves Christians. One interviewee commented, "I can hardly even say that I'm a Christian, to tell you the truth, which is kind of interesting," and another said, "Since my baptism, it's hard for me to say I'm a Christian. I'm not sure that I am." For many, the term "Christian" carried too much cultural baggage that they believed to be only peripherally related to Jesus Christ. For instance, one person described the conflict, saying, "I shouldn't let the media and a percentage of people claim a name to [Christianity] and something that's not how I perceive Christianity was really meant to be." Another elaborated on her reluctance to be called a Christian:

> I'm a follower of Jesus but in today's world I prefer not to call myself a Christian because when people say they are a Christian it has a different meaning in my mind.... And so I prefer to say that I am a follower of Jesus, that I believe in Jesus and God.

While they considered themselves, to varying degrees, to be followers of Jesus Christ, few spiritual seekers chose to claim a spiritual identity of Christian.

Because of their prior experiences in other spiritual traditions, spiritual seekers tended to carry with them beliefs from their earlier experiences. For instance, all of the spiritual seekers reported a belief in reincarnation. Rather than discarding this belief when they moved on, they instead incorporated it into their spiritual worldview. When asked if belief in reincarnation conflicted with their Christian views, none of the interviewees reported that it did. Instead they offered explanations for why reincarnation

was not in conflict with Scripture. For instance, one described her understanding on reincarnation in the Bible:

> So to me, honestly, that doesn't close the door on reincarnation, because that's not the essence of being a born-again Christian. And I think that the Bible makes a lot of references to things that are kind of like reincarnation a little bit.

Another, in describing her beliefs of life after death, spoke more tentatively:

> I'm not sure about reincarnation. I definitely could say that I believe that there's something beyond this. That when we die it's not the end. What exactly I think it is, I'm not really sure. Is our soul and our spirit just kind of out in the world still? Do we come back as someone else or something else? I'm not really sure. So I'm not conflicted with that at all. But I just believe there's more. What it is,... I'm not sure.

In other words, beliefs from previous spiritual experiences are not jettisoned, but incorporated, at least to some degree, into later spiritual identities.

For all of the spiritual seekers, the ability to question and wrestle with their faith defined their identity in a fundamental way. One interviewee stated that "inquiring minds want to know." Another described wrestling with the Creed:

> When we read the Nicene Creed every Sunday morning there's some stuff in there ... I think it sounds kind of ridiculous. And then I remember that it was written in the year 315 or something. No wonder it sounds so ridiculous.... [I]t was written a bazillion years ago!

Another person struggled with the doctrine of salvation: "What does it mean when people say, 'Have you been saved?' I really kind of cogitated on that. Thought about it. Prayed about it. Asked questions about it." This wrestling appears to be related not just to Christian doctrine but is an important aspect of these individuals' identities:

> For me it is important to always question. I like to ask questions. I got scolded one time for asking too many questions at work. But you know. I've always been the person to ask questions. And ... if something doesn't seem right to me, I'll ask a question about it. Help me understand what this means.

Finally, one interviewee described the relationship between her questioning and the church, saying, "I think that there are far too many answers and not nearly enough questions." None of the spiritual seekers lightly discarded Christian doctrine when it differed from their own worldview. Instead, most chose to engage with active wrestling, asking difficult questions and seeking hard answers.

The supernatural explainers, rather than wrestling with their beliefs, chose instead to separate their beliefs into different boxes or domains. Their primary spiritual domain remained Christian. However, in addition to their Christian beliefs, they maintained a second domain for psychic phenomena, which remained largely outside of the Christian purview. Lacking an adequate explanation for psychic events, these individuals turned to psychics and psychic literature for an explanation. For instance, individuals described emotional connections to others, both living and dead, as well as telekinesis, in which books and other objects unexpectedly flew off of shelves. One described her experience of her father's suicide:

> The one example I can give is the day my father committed suicide. And I was agitated, and I felt that there was really something wrong with him, and … I was just agitated. And I felt like I should get in the car and drive … to be there. But [an acquaintance] was coming that afternoon, and I couldn't. I couldn't leave. The whole day … I was just … I've not experienced anything like it. This absolute turmoil and internal agitation. And all of a sudden—it turned out to be the time he died—absolute … just like a switch … peace.

Interestingly, this woman did not mention the Holy Spirit as a possible explanation of her experience, turning instead to psychic phenomena. Another described books flying from a bookshelf, again turning to psychic phenomena as an explanation. Having experienced something their faith has not given them words to explain or describe, these individuals

appropriated the worldview of the psychics in the culture around them, and used this worldview to explain the phenomena. This explanatory approach appeared to describe most of the supernatural explainers who turned to non-Christian spiritualities to explain experiences that seemed unexplainable within the Christian worldview.

Finally, for most of the interviewees community formed an integral part of their identity. For many, this community had been realized within their local churches. For others, this sense of community remained a deep and apparently abiding longing. Many of the interviewees described the importance of a welcoming community both in terms of their own welcoming into their parish community, and the offering of that same welcoming to others. Indeed, this welcoming was intimately tied to their identity. For instance, one individual commented, "[W]hat makes it possible for me to continue going there is that I have been invited, encouraged ... to show myself. I have been valued for my difference. Not shunned for my difference." Another described the sense of belonging as an important aspect of her identity:

> I didn't know until I got out here was how important it is to have a community. I mean I sensed it, but more from a feeling,... but not from a feeling of knowing what it is.... And it's been interesting to find a place where I can go and people know who I am and they're glad to see me.... And I've been going there for over ten years, and I'm only just now beginning to trust that they're glad to see me.

This sense of belonging to a community was a significant part of the interviewees' spiritual identity, particularly for the spiritual seekers.

Identity can also be evaluated in terms of identity status. All of those interviewed demonstrated considerable spiritual exploration, as evidenced through involvement in multiple spiritual traditions and serious questioning related to their spiritual beliefs. Role commitment was demonstrated through the investment of considerable time and energy

in their local churches, including teaching Sunday school, singing in the choir, serving on the vestry, and even leading worship services. For many of the interviewees, their identity as a follower of Jesus had been internalized and was expressed as "a fundamental sense [that] I'm a child of God," "feeding my soul," and sensing their life as "a calling." Based on both role flexibility and role commitment, an achieved spiritual identity status could reasonably be proposed for most of those interviewed.

However, some caveats on the achieved spiritual identity status are warranted. First of all, which spiritual identity those interviewed had achieved is unclear. While most held at least some orthodox Christian beliefs, as measured by the SCO, many were reluctant to acknowledge themselves as Christians. Most were much more comfortable referring to themselves as Episcopalians, or as Episcopalian Buddhists. Their identity status may be achieved, but whether that identity can be, or they would want to be, considered Christian, at least in the orthodox sense, is questionable.

Furthermore, the permanency of the achieved identity statuses should be investigated. All of the spiritual seekers had a history of identifying with a particular faith or religious group and then moving on. While their identity statuses at the time cannot be absolutely determined, many reported year-long commitments, often following a period of further exploration. Their descriptions of their earlier spiritual identities bear at least a strong resemblance to an achieved status. If these individuals did indeed reach an achieved identity status, then the permanence of their present status, and the achieved identity status in general, must also be questioned.

Spiritual identities vary, depending on the spiritual journey of the individual. Supernatural explainers, who have never left Christianity, create an amalgam identity in

an effort to explain experiences that appear to be unexplained by their Christian faith. This amalgam often consists of Christian faith, defined more in terms of community than doctrine, augmented with psychic beliefs. However, when asked, they identify themselves as Christians. In contrast, spiritual seekers have belonged, and identified with, a number of different spiritual traditions. Some of the tenets of these other faiths, such as reincarnation, have remained part of their spiritual identity even as they moved on to other spiritual traditions.

Summary of Major Findings

Based on these results, the following was found:

1. New Age and paranormal beliefs varied by denomination with Episcopalians holding the most pagan beliefs and Presbyterians the fewest.

2. New Age and paranormal beliefs were negatively correlated with Christian orthodox belief. Increased Christian orthodoxy was associated with decreased New Age and paranormal beliefs.

3. Social desirability did not play a role in either Christian orthodoxy or New Age and paranormal beliefs.

4. Christian beliefs were reconciled with New Age and paranormal beliefs by finding biblical support for New Age beliefs, by redefining Christian terms to reduce or remove incompatibility, or by living in the midst of the *freedom* offered by their denomination to hold other non-orthodox beliefs. In general, potential incompatibilities or inconsistencies between competing beliefs were downplayed or ignored.

5. In terms of identity, spiritual seekers had, over time, committed themselves to a series of spiritual traditions, in an attempt to fulfill their spiritual longings. Tenets from previous faiths continued to be incorporated into their spiritual identities.

6. In terms of their spiritual identity, supernatural explainers remained more or less faithful to a single tradition, in this case Christianity, while augmenting it with other beliefs in an effort to explain experiences that seemed to them to occur beyond the boundaries of the Christian worldview.

7. The ability to question and wrestle with their faith formed an important part of the spiritual identities of both spiritual seekers and supernatural explainers.

8. Many of the individuals who held both Christian and New Age or paranormal beliefs demonstrated both exploration and commitment to the Christian faith, although their spiritual identity may not necessarily have been completely aligned with orthodox Christianity.

9. For many, particularly spiritual seekers, identity was, and continued to be, negotiated within the context of community.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Major Findings

Within mainline Protestant churches, individuals can be identified who hold both Christian and New Age or paranormal beliefs. These individuals create identities that incorporate Christian beliefs along with beliefs from other faith systems. Better understanding of pagan Christian identities will enable pastors to respond appropriately, and provide opportunities for spiritual formation.

This study was designed to look at these issues. The purpose of this research was to examine the prevalence of pagan beliefs within mainline denominations and to understand the spiritual identities of individuals who hold both Christian and New Age or paranormal beliefs.

The New Age of Episcopalians

The prevalence of New Age and paranormal beliefs in the Episcopal Church comes as little surprise to those who have observed the direction of the church in recent years. The church has grappled with priests who held Muslim (Tu), Buddhist (Congar), and Wiccan beliefs (Olsen) and promulgated liturgies to "Mother God," the "Queen of Heaven" (Olsen). At one point the bookstore associated with the national church offices offered more books on Buddhism than it did on youth ministry, along with laughing Buddha statues and incense to clean chakras (La Torra 15-16). New Age and paranormal beliefs have been apparent among Episcopal Church members as well. Orthodox Christians, both in and out of the Episcopal Church, have expressed increasing concern about these changes.

The correlations found in the survey results are, therefore, not surprising. New Age and paranormal beliefs are indeed present within the Episcopal Church—more than other denominations. These results give a measure of the severity of the problem facing the Episcopal Church, in particular, and Protestant churches, in general. In short, the Episcopal Church, or at least its members, are increasingly syncretistic.

This tendency towards syncretism permeates the culture outside the walls of Protestant churches as well. For instance, the lyrics to the Michael Franti and Spearhead song, "East to the West," include a call to religious pluralism:

> Life is too short to make just one decision,
> Music's too large for just one station,
> Love is too big for just one nation and
> God is too big for just one religion.
> One to the practice of bein in the flow an
> One to the tears of the things we let go an
> One to the moment we live in right now an
> One to the East West North and South....
> This whole thing seems upside down
> The whole wide world keeps turnin around

Belief in more than one faith is celebrated, whereas claims that Christianity alone holds the truth are seen as both rigid and exclusionary.

Interestingly, the results of this study contradict those of Emmons and Sobal. They found that New Age and paranormal beliefs were highest among Lutherans, yet low among Episcopalians (305). This study found that pagan beliefs were indeed high among Lutherans when compared to Methodists and Presbyterians. Episcopalians showed even higher beliefs on both New Age and paranormal items. These results are comparable to those of Possamai, Bellamy, and Castle (17). However, their research did not include either Methodists or Presbyterians. Furthermore, they studied Anglicans in the Church of

England rather than Episcopalians in the United States. While similar, Anglicans and Episcopalians do not necessarily represent the same population.

While denominational affiliation was strongly correlated with New Age and paranormal beliefs, the same could not be said of the number of years an individual had belonged to their denomination. No significant correlations existed between pagan beliefs and the number of years a person had affiliated with a particular denomination. Without further research, the meaning and significance of this finding is difficult to understand. In particular, without data on where the individual had belonged previously and for how long the relationship between denomination and pagan beliefs cannot be determined. However, these results raise interesting questions of causality. If no relationship exists between the number of years in a denomination and pagan beliefs, then individuals may be choosing denominations that correspond with their preexisting pagan beliefs.

Past research has often found correlations between a number of other variables and pagan beliefs. For instance, Baker and Draper (418), Emmons and Sobal (324), Glendinning and Bruce (405), Glendinning (592), Mencken, Bader, and Stark (203), Mencken (77), Orenstein (308), and Possamai, Bellamy, and Castle (20) all found that New Age and paranormal beliefs drop with age. This study found no such pattern and instead agrees with the results of Wuthnow, who found no relationship between age and pagan beliefs (159). However, a caveat must be offered: Because the mean age of respondents to this survey was 58, the lack of responses from younger individuals may have skewed the results.

A similar pattern exists in relation to education. Previous researchers, including Baker and Draper (418), Donahue (182), Fitzpatrick and Shook (324), Mencken (77),

Richman and Bell (202), and Wuthnow (160), found that increased education was correlated with decreased New Age and paranormal beliefs. However, two researchers discovered that New Age and paranormal beliefs increased with education (Glendinning and Bruce 405; Rice 101). This study can confirm neither of these conclusions and found no relationship between education and pagan beliefs. This conclusion mirrors the results of both Mencken, Bader, and Stark (203) and Glendinning (586) who found no correlation between pagan beliefs and education.

Unlike earlier studies, this study found no relationship between evangelical orientation and pagan beliefs. While Mencken (79) and Mencken, Bader, and Stark (200) both found evangelicals less like to hold pagan beliefs, that conclusion was not supported by the data in this study. However, the relatively small number of evangelicals across denominations may have made statistical significance challenging.

Finally, like most of the other studies, this research discovered a statistically significant difference between genders in their New Age and paranormal beliefs. This finding is consistent with the findings of Auton, Pope, and Seeger (716), Baker and Draper (418), Foster, Smith, and Stovin, Glendinning and Bruce (404), Kelley (310), Mencken, Bader, and Stark (203), Mencken (77), Orenstein (308), Possamai, Bellamy, and Castle (20), Rice (101), and Wuthnow (160). However, as discussed earlier, whether these results are meaningful is less clear. Women did indeed hold more New Age and paranormal beliefs than men, yet the difference between men and women was a single point on a nine-point scale. These results represent more of a weak corroboration of the previous research rather than a resounding confirmation.

This study did find support for what Hanegraaff describes as the secularization of religion (305). He describes "new syntheses" of existing symbolic systems that give meaning and purpose to life experiences (304). Many of the survey and interview respondents described exactly this type of "new synthesis" of their own spiritualities in the melding together of Christian and New Age or paranormal spiritual elements.

These new syntheses are in direct contradiction of the biblical mandate for holiness. In the biblical worldview, God's people are called to keep themselves separate from the surrounding pagan cultures out of awe and reverence for God (Kaufmann 126). Instead, the Episcopal and Lutheran churches appear to be incorporating more and more of the spiritual worldviews of the non-Christian cultures around them.

In the bigger picture, the situation described by the results of this study echo the situation that Paul faced in many of the early churches. Paul describes the Corinthian church struggling against the "wisdom of this age" (1 Cor. 2:6). John also warns of the dangers:

> Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already.

Churches cannot, and should not, accept all beliefs and belief systems as equal. Yet this acceptance of all belief systems is exactly what many Protestant churches appear to be doing. If Protestant churches actively endorse and encourage New Age and paranormal beliefs, they become the kind of false teachers about which Scripture warns.

Paul warned Timothy to beware of those who "accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth to wander off

into myths" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Similarly, he warned the Colossians to take care not to be taken "captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world" (Col. 2:8). False teachers are those who point away from God's truth.

Paul also conveys the solution. He told Timothy, "[P]reach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2). Preaching and teaching, with patience, become foundational in combating syncretism. For Protestant churches, this teaching can be accomplished through a renewed emphasis on catechesis.

Catechesis provides an intentional and thorough process of instruction in the tenets of the Christian faith. Robert W. Pazmiño defines catechesis as "instruction that fosters the integration of Christian truth with life" (59). J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett define catechesis as "the church's ministry of grounding and growing God's people in the Gospel and its implications for doctrine, devotion, duty, and delight" (29). Packer and Parrett go on to make distinctions between protocatechesis, catechesis proper, and ongoing catechesis. Protocatechesis is directed particularly at "seekers." Catechesis proper prepares "children or adult converts for baptism or confirmation" and full inclusion in the body of Christ. Ongoing catechesis "refers to the ministry of teaching and formation that really is neverending as believers are continually nurtured in the way of the Lord." Through catechesis important Christian concepts such as salvation, redemption, and sanctification can be explored and investigated.

Catechesis provides an individual with an understanding of the true faith. For a number of reasons, many Christians lack an understanding of the basic tenets of the

church. David Kinnaman comments, "Overall, knowledge of Scripture, doctrine, and church history is poor among most Christians" (27). Indeed, some churches may encourage illiteracy by watering down the faith, particularly as a means of reaching individuals outside of the church. David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons describe the dangers of this approach to reaching outsiders:

> As we work to change the negative perceptions of outsiders, we need to avoid an opposite and equally dangerous extreme. Some Christians respond to outsiders' negativity by promoting a less offensive faith. The unpopular parts of Christian teaching are omitted or deemphasized. They hijack the image of Jesus by portraying him as an open-minded, bit-hearted, and never-offended-anyone moral teacher. That is an entirely wrong idea of Jesus. He taught remarkably tough truths about human beings and sin.... [S]oftening or reshaping the gospel is an utterly wrong response to the objections people raise. (32-33)

Catechesis provides a remedy for both a lack of knowledge and a watering down of the gospel.

Ideally, catechesis should focus not only on training the mind but on forming the heart as well. Mentors provide an excellent means of doing this heart formation. Mentors can help clarify catechetical topics but can also help articulate how these topics apply in daily living. However, for mentors to be effective, they must themselves already hold an orthodox faith. Pazmiño describes the requirements for a mentor:

> Both catechesis and nurture presume that the teacher, parent, model, or discipler is a committed Christian and that the student is either a Christian or one who is and will be seriously considering a lifelong commitment to follow Christ as Lord and Savior. (59)

Mentoring, whether an intentional part of catechesis or not, requires committed Christians who can both communicate their own faith and help in the forming of faith in another.

Finally, an important part of catechesis is clarifying what is not believed. For

instance, the Christian belief in life after death is *not* the same as the New Age belief in reincarnation. Some catechists accomplish this clarification by explicitly comparing and contrasting Christian beliefs on topics such as God, salvation, and heaven with those of other faiths. Doing so helps separate Christian beliefs from the beliefs of other religions.

Protestant denominations must also be willing to stand apart from the cultures around them in their beliefs. This separation from the surrounding cultures returns churches to the holiness that God requires of them. Christians must be willing to maintain this distinctiveness from the surrounding culture.

Readopting holiness will also address some of the problems of desacralization. A faith steeped in reverence and awe stands in contrast to rationalism. A church awash in holiness is an invitation to encounter God.

Paganism versus Orthodoxy

A young man, just beginning confirmation classes, was surprised to learn that reincarnation was not part of the orthodox Christian faith. Raised in the Episcopal Church and active in the men's club, he knew that life after death was one aspect of Christian belief. But not until he attended confirmation classes, in which the differences between reincarnation and redemption were explicitly addressed, did he understand that orthodox Christians do *not* believe in reincarnation.[2]

His confusion is understandable. The differences between the Christian belief in life after death and the Buddhist belief in life after death *again and again* are in some ways quite small. Those differences are also extraordinarily significant. In fact, Christians do believe in *a* reincarnation—that after death they will once again have a physical body.

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[2] The individual described here is based on a blended view of the survey and interview responses, as well as personal experience.

The difference occurs in whether that reincarnation happens once and for all as part of Jesus' glorious new creation or whether it happens again and again until the person "get's it right."

Many of the survey respondents and the interviewees showed similar misunderstandings. Many articulated beliefs that were misinterpretations of Christian doctrine and tenets. For instance, one survey respondent commented, "I feel we are fated to live other lives by nature of God's will." Another described the possibility of God's actions in reincarnation:

> I believe a soul is immortal. My soul was created when God created all things and it will never die. It may not have been in other human bodies but it has been somewhere in the cosmos and when my human body dies it very well could be given to another human being. I have on several occations [sic] felt a real sense of belonging when traveling in other parts of the world.

A third person referenced Scripture as she described where God might choose to reincarnate her:

> Possibly this world, or other worlds ("There are many mansions in my father's house"). I believe that our true self will pass through whatever lives/worlds will help it to grow and be beautiful. If that means going through many lives here on earth, so be it. If that means living many lives on many worlds—so be that as well. It all comes down to God loving us and helping us to grow and realize more of our God-infused beauty and brilliance. It's like we're going to soul school.

All three of these individuals believe that they are accurately describing God's active involvement in the process of reincarnation. However all three individuals articulate an understanding that differs significantly from the orthodox Christian understanding of life after death.

These results are consistent with at least some of the existing research. Bainbridge (386), Emmons and Sobal (307), and Glendinning report that New Age and paranormal

beliefs drop as Christian beliefs increase. Not all researchers agree with this conclusion. For instance, many studies have found a positive correlation between Christian and pagan beliefs (e.g., Possamai, Bellamy, and Castle 24; Glendinning and Bruce 404; Flere and Kirbiš, "New Age, Religiosity" 166; Granqvist et al. 596; Francis, Williams, and Robbins, "Christianity" 342). The data from this study clearly supports the former view, indicating that New Age and paranormal beliefs are negatively correlated with orthodox Christian beliefs with a probability of less than .001.

Researchers have proposed a number of theories to explain how individuals hold both Christian and New Age or paranormal beliefs. Among these theories are the single worldview theory (Flere and Kirbiš, "New Age Is Not Inimical" 183; "New Age, Religiosity" 167; Tobacyk, "Final Thoughts"), the small step theory (Houtman, Aupers, and Heelas 177; Houtman and Aupers 315; Heelas and Houtman 94), the curvilinear belief theory (Baker and Draper 422; Bainbridge 390), the separate spheres theory (Francis, Williams, and Robbins, "Christianity" 342; "Personality" 37; Kristensen 91), the safety net theory (Brink 83; Fitzpatrick and Shook 326; Rudski 312), the compensation theory (Emmons and Sobel 310; Glendinning 593; Granqvist and Hagekull 539; McKinnon 302; Weeks, Weeks, and Daniel 606), the marginalization theory (Wuthnow 167; Brink 84; Mencken, Bader, and Stark 201), desacralization theory (Molnar 60), and the compatibility theory (Mencken 70). Each of these theories will be addressed in terms of the results.

The results of this study provide no support for the single worldview theory. Tobacyk proposes a single worldview as a continuum with science on one end and religion on the other. However, if a single worldview existed, one would not anticipate

finding individuals who are high in Christian orthodoxy but low in pagan beliefs alongside individuals who are high in pagan beliefs and low in Christian orthodoxy, as well as those who are high in both. Therefore, a single worldview can be discounted as an explanation for these results.

The separate spheres theory is also not supported by the results of this theory. Pagan and Christian beliefs do not overlap in this theory. However, if the separate spheres theory was true, one would not expect individuals to use biblical arguments to bolster their beliefs in reincarnation. The separate spheres theory cannot adequately explain the data.

The results of this study also fail to support the safety net theory. This theory proposes that individuals choose to hold both Christian and pagan beliefs as a spiritual insurance policy, similar to men who wear both a belt and suspenders (Brink 83). However, no survey respondents or interviewees described their faith in these terms. Thus, this study finds no support for the safety net theory.

The compensation theory is also unsupported by the data. In the compensation theory, pagan beliefs are used to replace Christian beliefs, filling the spiritual void left behind (Glendinning 593). Again, the interviews fail to support this idea. Interviewees did not describe a permanent abandonment of Christianity. Furthermore, even their early Christian experiences seemed to have been less than fulfilling. Many were seeking to fill a spiritual void, but it did not appear to be a void that had been previously filled by Christian beliefs. Indeed, the void appeared to be long-standing, spanning any early Christian experiences as well. Therefore, the compensation theory cannot adequately explain these results.

Marginalization does not appear to be a factor either. In the marginalization theory, pagan beliefs are adopted as an alternative to Christianity as a means to address an individual's powerlessness and marginalization within a culture (Wuthnow 157). None of the respondents described a significant sense of marginalization, either presently or in the past. Marginalization is probably not the cause of the pagan beliefs noted in this study.

Compatibility theory, combining both marginalization theory and the small step theory, does not fit the observed data. In compatibility theory, individuals engage in "portfolio diversification" as a mechanism for addressing marginalization (Mencken 70). Again, interviewees did not report a sense of being marginalized within their culture. Like marginalization theory, compatibility theory does not explain the results of this study.

This study finds little support for the curvilinear belief theory. The curvilinear belief theory posits two belief systems with shared common beliefs (Bainbridge 390-93). Based on the curvilinear belief theory, pagan beliefs should diminish as church participation increases. Results from this study offered little support for the curvilinear belief theory. However, two caveats must be offered. Because the sample was drawn from churches, the results are skewed toward increased participation. Secondly, the number of individuals in the lesser participation groups was very small. Because of these caveats, the curvilinear belief theory cannot be abandoned until further research has been done.

Finally, no obvious support exists for the small step theory. The small step theory proposes that as an individual's Christian beliefs decline, pagan beliefs are incorporated

in their stead (Houtman, Aupers, and Heelas 177). If the small step theory is valid, then interest in Christianity should wane and pagan beliefs increase. However, the interviews in this study did not describe this theory. Instead, commitment to Christian beliefs and ideals were increasing among many of the respondents. Individuals may have taken steps away from Christianity at some point, but this avoidance of Christianity was certainly no longer true.

The present study did find support for Molnar's theory of desacralization. According to Molnar, pagan beliefs may be an effort on the part of individuals to reintroduce symbol and myth into a Christian faith that has become overly rationalistic (60). His comments ring true to the descriptions of many of those interviewed in this study. One individual described most religion as not "spiritual enough." Another described a sense of being spiritually starved. A third person described her own need to experience the sacred, saying, "[T]his isn't going to do it for me. I needed something more,... something deeper, to go on my journey." Interestingly enough, more than one person encountered the sacred in the rites and rituals of a liturgical church. However, desacralization by itself does not completely explain the pagan Christian beliefs of those interviewed.

The data does seem to support is a process by which a variety of beliefs are accumulated but never released when the individual moves on to a new belief system. Rather than the small steps of Houtman, Aupers, and Heelas, individuals experience a spiritual velcro, in which beliefs from each of the faith traditions they have walked through *stick* to them, much as lint sticks to velcro. This accumulation may be especially true of the velcroed beliefs if they provide a sense of the sacred that may be lacking in the

individual's Christian faith. A longing for the sacred may indeed have originally driven them to New Age belief systems, as an alternative to an overly rationalistic Christian faith, and some of these beliefs may continue to cling to them when they return to Christianity. Because the individual does not release older beliefs and replace them with new ones, the beliefs begin to accumulate, creating a worldview that makes little coherent sense.

Perhaps the greatest threat to the Christian worldview comes from ideas associated with the continuity worldview. In this worldview "all things are continuous with each other" (Oswalt 43), and no separation or difference exists among objects. Everything is connected. The continuity worldview often embraces beliefs such as polytheism, idols, divination, magic, and god in everything and everyone. Salvation becomes a human effort. Scripture explicitly denies and argues against the continuity worldview (Deut. 32:39; Ps. 55:9; 96:5; Exod. 20:4-5a; Deut. 18:10-11; Jer. 10:2; Rom. 2:23-24), yet many individuals in this study hold these same beliefs. Oswalt argues that the scriptural understanding of God's transcendence underlies the difference between the biblical and continuity worldviews:

> God is not the cosmos, and the cosmos is not God. God is radically other than his creation. This thought undergirds everything the Bible says about reality. From start to finish, the Bible adamantly resists the principle of continuity. God and the divine realm are not in any way a part of this world. He is everywhere present *in* the world, but He is *not* the world and world is *not* Him. (original emphasis; 81)

Consistently, the continuity worldview denies the transcendence of God.

This denial is especially poignant given Molnar's description of desacralization (44). Cultural emphasis on rationality has deprived individuals of opportunities to experience the sacred. Seeking something to fill this void, individuals turn instead to New

Age and paranormal activities. Since the continuity worldview ultimately denies God's transcendence, and sometimes God entirely, it will also result in an unfulfilled and unrealized faith. Only a return to the one true God and an awareness of both his transcendence and his immanence can ultimately provide the sense of the sacred that so many people crave.

The answer then lies not in embracing the tenets of the continuity worldview, but in turning from them and returning to God. This turning to God is the essence of holiness, the intentional separation and rejection of pagan worldviews. Kaufmann describes this holiness, saying, "The 'charge' of the holy involves only its separation from the profane. It is an expression of reverence, of supreme awe, entirely different from the pagan idea" (104). When continuity is rejected, the sacred and the holy may return. Individuals may choose to consecrate themselves to God (Lev. 11:44). In doing so, they are renewed in the image of God (Eph. 4:22-24). They become sanctified (1 Thess. 4:3).

Practically, this *resacralization* must occur through formation and catechesis. Catechesis addresses the false beliefs of the continuity worldview, while spiritual formation addresses the heart of the matter and offers an opportunity to re-experience the sacred. The writer of Proverbs instructs how to do this formation of head and heart:

> Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. (Prov. 3:5-7)

Both heart and mind must be engaged in returning to God.

Given the velcroed faith of the spiritual seekers, catechesis is especially important to address not only the tenets of the Christian faith, but also the inconsistencies between the Christian and continuity worldviews. In doing so, catechesis can help explicate the

advantages of Christian beliefs over continuity beliefs. For instance, individuals report believing in reincarnation because it provides for life *do-over*s. Catechists can point out that redemption removes any need for a *do-over*. Jesus has already taken care of whatever needed to be redone. These kinds of explanations can help both spiritual seekers and supernatural explainers to let go of New Age and paranormal beliefs that they have incorporated into their worldviews through their spiritual journeys.

Nonconforming Faith

New Mexico holds both San Miguel Mission, the oldest church in the continental United States, and the Lama Foundation, related to Ram Dass, author of the New Age book *Be Here Now*. Living in New Mexico, one is surrounded by both historic Christianity, often in the form of the Catholic missions, and a thriving New Age presence, as evidenced by spiritual retreat centers and gurus. Even the paranormal is well represented with Area 51 located in Roswell, the site of a reported alien visitation on 14 June 1947.

Christians living within this spiritual milieu must negotiate their spiritual identities as Christians, all-the-while bombarded with New Age and paranormal experiences. Orthodox Christians are inundated with non-Christian beliefs and ideals. Somehow in the midst of this spiritual landscape, orthodox Christians must hold onto their faith.

Results from this study indicate that, in general, orthodox Christians do indeed avoid New Age and paranormal beliefs. However, researchers have proposed that orthodox Christians report fewer New Age and paranormal beliefs only out of conformity. In other words, knowing that Christians should not believe in the New Age,

orthodox Christians may hold New Age and paranormal beliefs but intentionally underreport these beliefs in order to appear more orthodox. Responses to this survey were evaluated to ascertain whether they truly reflected the participants' orthodox Christian beliefs or whether participants were answering out of a need to conform.

Some researchers posit that orthodox Christians are often motivated by social conformity. Mencken, Bader, and Stark hypothesize that the consistently low pagan belief scores among active Christians might be the result of a need to appear as *good* Christians. Knowing that good Christians should not hold pagan beliefs, they intentionally underreport the true degree to which they hold New Age and paranormal tenets (195). In effect, orthodox Christians are motivated by social desirability, and any measure of their true belief in paganism is skewed.

However, the results of this study do not support this theory. Using the SDS-17 as a measure of a person's tendency towards social desirability, or conformity, the present research did not find a statistically significant relationship between social desirability and either Christian orthodox beliefs or New Age and paranormal beliefs. In other words, conformity, as measured by social desirability, did not appear to have any relationship with an individual's Christian or pagan beliefs.

Indeed Christians are called *not* to conform to the world's expectations. Paul told the church in Rome, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12.2). Christian faith is not a dumb and blind faith but a faith that is owned. Faith is not conformity.

Freedom to Believe

Her anger, on being told that reincarnation was not a Christian belief, was palpable. Not only did she firmly believe in reincarnation, but she also considered herself a Christian. When the pastor attempted to explain why reincarnation was not a Christian concept, she dismissed him in anger. She soon stopped participating in the Bible study and shortly thereafter ceased coming to church entirely.[3]

Several interviewees described the freedom of belief that they found, especially in the Episcopal Church, and the value this freedom held. For instance, one described the permission granted by an earlier teacher:

> And that's what been such a blessing for me that I learned from [my teacher].... [S]he would teach something, and then she would look at us and she would say, "Now listen, I am not the authority. You have to decide whether this is something ... for you or [if] it doesn't work for you." And nobody had ever given me permission to do that before.

Another expressed the openness she experiences:

> I don't know if it is universally Episcopal, but I am finding that it might be, that there is an openness certainly at the church where I am a member now. There is an openness to alternative ways of thinking and understanding.

Another explicitly referenced the doctrinal freedom of the Episcopal Church: "I think that's something I like about the Episcopal Church in particular, that it allows a certain freedom of thought and slightly different approaches to what we believe." This freedom and openness was valued by many of those interviewed.

This doctrinal freedom allowed individuals to rely on an internal authority to analyze and evaluate faith claims. Not surprisingly, New Age faiths often prize exactly

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[3] The individual described here is based on a blended view of the survey and interview responses, as well as personal experience.

this same internal authority. For instance, Eckhart Tolle tells his followers that truth resides within them:

> I cannot tell you any spiritual truth that deep within you don't know already. All I can do is remind you of what you have forgotten. Living knowledge, ancient and yet ever new, is then activated and released from within every cell of your body. (xvi)

Similar claims are made by other New Age practitioners as well.

Many of the survey respondents spoke about the many ways to God. For instance, one individual stated, "I believe that wisdom is not just limited to christianity [sic]. Yoga has been part of the Eastern spiritual system long before christianity [sic]." One described the Bible: "It is sacred knowledge, but not the only source of sacred knowledge provided to this world by the Creator." Another respondent went even further, arguing that all religions say the same thing: "[The great traditions are] all saying the same thing, using different languages." All argued against Christianity as the only way to God.

Interestingly, some research indicates a correlation between openness and paranormal beliefs. For instance, Baker and Draper report more paranormal beliefs among individuals with an "open, nonexclusive" approach to spiritual beliefs (422). In this case, the emphasis on freedom of belief among both the survey respondents and the interviewees may be related in some way to their high levels of New Age and paranormal beliefs. If so, then a sample of individuals with more orthodox beliefs might evince less of an emphasis on freedom.

Furthermore, this emphasis on freedom may also be a function of an identity status in moratorium. Kiesling et al. describe individuals in moratorium who consider themselves to be the "sole arbiters of truth" (57). Furthermore, individuals in moratorium often report high quest scores (Fulton 9; Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer 382). These

results would be consistent with the findings of this study, demonstrating a reliance on an internal authority in determining truth claims.

Insistence on freedom of belief is not a new cultural phenomenon. Indeed this same pattern can be found in ancient Israelite culture. Even though the Israelites knew of God's expectation to hold themselves apart from the surrounding cultures, they chose instead to incorporate asherah poles and worship of the Baals into their spiritual lives. The demands for freedom of choice, particularly spiritual freedom, are longstanding and transcend any particular time or culture.

A person living with an emphasis on freedom perceives all beliefs as potentially equal. Scripture fails to support this approach. For instance, Paul warned the Colossians, "See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ" (Col. 2:8). A scriptural worldview understands that not all beliefs are equivalent.

Instead of freely choosing between supposedly equivalent beliefs based on human wisdom, individuals need to discern, based on God's wisdom, true beliefs. Paul described this godly discernment to the Corinthians:

> Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (1 Cor. 2:11b-13)

Decisions about beliefs should be made on the basis of God's wisdom, not on the basis of personal freedom.

Exercising freedom of belief fails to recognize and acknowledge God's call to holiness. Indeed, freedom of belief may fail to recognize God at all. Holiness is limited to

God alone, and predicated on the avoidance of the profane (Kaufmann 126). God's people are called to be holy as well, because God is holy. However, this holiness requires that they also set themselves apart from the profane. Freedom of belief, in as much as it implies the right to choose *any* particular belief, does not meet God's requirement to set oneself apart.

A spiritual identity based on personal freedom will ultimately result in the creation of a false self. Paul, however, challenges Christians to abandon the false self. Writing to the Ephesians, Paul exhorted them to let go of their old selves:

> [P]ut off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and ... be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and ... put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4:22-24)

Ultimately, the freedom to choose any belief can only lead to a false identity and not to the new creation that humans are promised in Scripture (2 Cor. 5:17).

Finally, freedom of belief tends to place the locus of truth within the individual. Scripture clearly points to the existence of absolute truth. For instance, Jesus announces that he is "the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6). Jesus does not hedge here, and he offers no possibility that he is one truth among many. Jesus says, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Simply, Jesus is *the* truth. Indeed, true freedom can only be found in absolute truth.

Churches that actively practice catechesis can address the freedom to believe both directly and indirectly. Indirectly, freedom of belief can be addressed through careful catechesis with special attention on articulating the basic tenets of the faith. Doing so can give clarity about what is Christian belief and what is not.

Talking explicitly about freedom of belief can be helpful. For instance, catechists can point out that individuals retain their free will. They can choose to believe in the Christian faith or not. However, calling oneself a Christian while believing in reincarnation is something like calling oneself a vegetarian while still eating bacon. Calling oneself a Christian while simultaneously holding contra-Christian beliefs involves an active redefinition of the term *Christian*. To do so is to enter a world in which words have no absolute definitions or meanings. When explained this way, individuals are less likely to argue in favor of freedom of belief.

Spiritual Seekers

The pattern is familiar. Raised in a nominally Christian home, she left for college without any great clarity on who she was or what she believed. After a period of spiritual fallowness, she found herself yearning for something more, something spiritual. A friend invited her to a meeting of a local New Age group, and, curious, she went. The group's New Age beliefs made sense, and she found peace in the meditations.

But after awhile her experiences in the New Age group began to sour. No longer did meditation bring the peace it had before. Increasingly, she found herself at odds with the leadership and the other members. Perhaps the problem was the tenets of their faith or the cliquishness of the group. Perhaps the problem was her increasing disillusionment with the spiritual master. At some point her internal conflict became too great, and she separated herself from the group. However, this separation left another spiritual void, and before long she found another, better, spiritual tradition to follow.[4]

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[4] The individual described here is based on a blended view of the survey and interview responses, as well as personal experience.

This pattern described the spiritual journeys of many of the women interviewed. Their lives were characterized by spiritual seeking. Commitment to a group or tradition ended, sooner or later, in disillusionment. Then the cycle repeated.

The women classified as spiritual seekers in this study had participated in between three and nine different faiths or spiritual traditions. For some, this pattern began in college. For others, college provided a fallow time. For all of them, a procession of faiths and spiritual traditions characterized their spiritual journeys.

For the spiritual seekers, their present beliefs appeared to incorporate many of the beliefs of their previous faiths. Each new faith did not entirely replace the faith before it. Instead, beliefs from earlier belief systems were carried forward into later faith traditions, creating a belief system that was neither the old faith nor the new. One person described this process: "I would say I've integrated everything from every place I've been, definitely. I mean ... it's like take what you like and leave the rest kind of thing. I've definitely done that." With each new belief system, more beliefs accrued, to be incorporated into their spiritual identity.

This process of constructing an identity from a myriad of sources has sometimes been referred to as *bricolage*. Harper-Bisso describes bricolage within the context of the neo-pagan movement. However, that neo-pagan movement differs in that spiritual identities are constructed and maintained through conversion narratives (327). Unlike the neo-pagans, those interviewed in this study did not have a well-rehearsed conversion narrative. Indeed, the interview itself was often the first time that individuals had explicitly attempted to define their identity. Several of the interviewees expressed their gratitude for the opportunity to process both their spiritual journeys and their beliefs.

Of particular interest with the spiritual seekers was their tendency to assume, and then discard, spiritual identities. The spiritual seekers described earlier spiritual identities that sounded as if they had reached an achieved spiritual identity status. These earlier achieved spiritual identities raise the question of whether an individual can revert to an earlier identity status or experience identity regression.

Kiesling et al. describe spiritual identity development as a lifelong process (60). Poll and Smith point out that identity development is often nonlinear and offer the possibility that spiritual identities may even regress (134-35). These possible explanations for the apparent cyclical process seemed to define the identity statuses of many of the spiritual seekers.

Interestingly, most of the spiritual seekers expressed a spiritual longing. One interviewee commented that she had been "thwarted [in] attempts to connect with the divine." Another remarked, "I wasn't trained to ... have a relationship with God." These longings seemed to describe a state that Templeton and Eccles refer to as transcendent personal experiences (254). They consider transcendent personal experiences to be an important part of an individual's spiritual identity and are often experienced in collective situations.

After their years of wandering, some of the spiritual seekers finally found their spiritual longings fulfilled in the Episcopal Church. One described her church's alternative services: "[It] really feeds my soul." Another described her relationship to God: "I feel most connected to God in the Episcopal Church ... through the prayers, through the songs, through the readings from the Bible. Through the Eucharist." A

longing for something more—something spiritual—was expressed by many of the respondents.

Desacralization provides one possible explanation for this longing. Molnar argues that an overemphasis on rationality has resulted in a sterile and desacralized view of the world (44). John Lennon describes this worldview:

> Imagine there's no heaven, it's easy if you try
> No people below us, above it's only sky
> Imagine all the people
> Living for today
> Imagine there's no countries, it isn't hard to do
> No need to kill or die for and no religions too
> Imagine all the people
> Living life in peace
> Imagine no possessions I wonder if you can
> No need for greed or hunger, a brotherhood of man
> Imagine all the people
> Sharing for the world
> You may say I'm a dreamer
> But I'm not the only one
> Take my hand and join us
> And the world will live, will live as one.

Lennon describes, with poetic words and a haunting melody, a world stripped of the supernatural. Religions are conflated with death, and heaven and hell dismissed. Desacralization epitomizes much of modern Western culture, including the desacralization of Christian faith.

According to Molnar, this desacralized faith leaves open the door for other, particularly pagan, beliefs. When the Christian faith is largely devoid of the supernatural, individuals look elsewhere for the sacred: "In Christianity it is belief in the supernatural that keeps the element of the sacred alive and publicly active. Its fatigue, its listlessness or indifference, opens the way for a revival of the pagan alternative" (79). Certainly the experiences of many of those interviewed for this study would confirm Molnar's theory.

Finally, when asked about conflict or tension between their beliefs, spiritual seekers report very little. This lack of tension may be avoidance of conflict by ignoring it (Benassi, Singer, and Reynolds 348). However, this explanation seems unlikely. When pressed, spiritual seekers acknowledged that their particular constellation of beliefs may seem to be in conflict with traditional Christian beliefs. Most spiritual seekers are able to give reasons they believe their beliefs make sense and may even cite the Bible in doing so.

Spiritual seekers do not appear to be engaging in a "cafeteria style religion," as Exline describes it (187). If anything, they are closer to the "do-it-yourself" spirituality. But even this "do-it-yourself" spirituality fails to describe adequately the rather organic process by which beliefs are accumulated over time, velcroed together into a spiritual identity. However, this velcro approach is similar both to the cafeteria style religion and the do-it-yourself spirituality in that it tends to lead away from an orthodox faith.

Not only does a velcro spirituality lead away from faith, it also leads a person away from the true self. False teachings and beliefs mar the *imago Dei* and reinforce a false sense of self. Paul told the Corinthians, "[T]he god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." If one's understanding of the *imago Dei* is warped, then one's understanding of one's self is warped as well.

Velcro spirituality leaves one entrapped in worldly ideas. Paul's warning to the Colossians applies here as well (Col. 2:8). A velcro approach to spirituality leaves a person captive to worldly philosophy and deceit, which is not in accordance with Jesus

Christ. An antidote to this worldly wisdom is again found in Paul's letter to the Corinthians:

> Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. (1 Cor. 2:11b-13)

Paul wrote similarly to the church in Ephesus:

> [P]ut off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and ... be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and ... put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. (Eph. 4:22-24)

The velcro approach to faith leads neither to life nor to one's true identity.

Again, a well thought-out and thorough approach to catechesis provides the best response to a velcroed faith. Intentional catechesis provides a mechanism to address many of the issues that face spiritual seekers. Catechesis can help clarify what is part of orthodox faith and what is not and why. Particularly for the spiritual seeker with velcroed beliefs, this kind of clarification is pivotal and provides the individual with an opportunity finally to discard old and conflicting beliefs.

However, because their identity often revolves around being a spiritual seeker, individuals may find it challenging to release old velcroed beliefs. This process must be supported through intentional spiritual formation. This spiritual formation should be focused on a deeper understanding of being made in the image of God and the implications of that on a person's spiritual identity. This spiritual formation should also encourage a resacralization of faith, particularly in terms of mystery and awe.

Spiritual formation can also help form a person's identity and offers an opportunity to encounter the supernatural within a Christian context. Prayer becomes an

integral part of this process and opens one up to an encounter with Jesus. Other spiritual disciplines may also be used in an effort to provide opportunities to experience the sacred.

Finally worship within a community of believers is foundational. Not only does worship reorient a person to God, but it provides the mythic and symbolic elements that are often an important aspect of the resacralization of the individual. Liturgical worship, in particular, may be of benefit. Sacraments of the church may also be efficacious with their emphasis on "outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace" (*Book of Common Prayer* 857). Baptism and communion may particularly resonate with spiritual seekers as they offer a sacred experience of God. Worship provides an opportunity to encounter the supernatural in the form of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Supernatural Explainers

She had always had a strong sense of connection with her sister. As adults, the connection only became stronger. When her sister was in an accident, she knew something had happened, even before the phone call from the hospital disclosed the details. Their connection was *spiritual*, beyond the realm of facts.

Her Christian faith provided no explanation about how she could *know* these things, nor about how she could have this kind of spiritual connection. Indeed, her church discouraged discussion of supernatural topics, encouraging instead a rational approach to faith. Conversations about events beyond the world of what could be seen, heard, touched, smelled, or tasted did not happen.

Lacking a paradigm within her Christian faith to elucidate these experiences, she looked elsewhere for a reasonable explanation. A psychic provided a context to

understand the connection and encouraged the use of tarot cards to tap into the wisdom of the universe. Her experiences all made sense now.[5]

This second approach to faith was described by a small subset of individuals, including one of the pilot interviews. Rather than passing through a number of different spiritual traditions, they had remained Christians. However, they were Christians with extra beliefs, particularly belief in psychic events. Unlike the sequential faith of the spiritual seekers, these beliefs were held in parallel.

When asked why they had turned to psychic phenomena, these women described experiences that in their minds failed to be accounted for in the Christian perspective. Seeking an explanation, they looked to psychics to define and name their encounters. Unable to incorporate these experiences into a Christian worldview, they instead chose to hold two largely parallel belief systems that were accessed as the need arose.

Lacking a vocabulary to explain what happened, many spoke in terms of "connections." One commented, "My mother and I have these really strong connections. When I was away at school,... I would always know something was off." Connectedness was an important aspect of their experience.

The supernatural explainers most typify Molnar's theory of desacralization. They described a faith that was often defined in terms of the social gospel and lacked encounters with the sacred or the supernatural. This description, in which all experiences are explained by natural causes, aligns completely with Molnar's theory (102). When these individuals then encountered the supernatural, they lacked either the experience or the vocabulary to understand it. Their experiences were, however, explained by psychics.

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[5] The individual described here is based on a blended view of the survey and interview responses, as well as personal experience.

Again, this description of their experiences completely aligns with Molnar's theory of desacralization. He writes, "[T]he pagan worldview persists behind the Christian worldview and [under] favorable circumstances, among which the most important is the fading of Christian truth as symbolized by myth,... manifest itself with a renewed vigor" (60). Lacking an explanation, the supernatural explainers turn to psychics for clarification. For the supernatural explainers, their psychic beliefs were held in parallel to their Christian beliefs.

Engagement with psychic beliefs implies an engagement with the continuity worldview as well. Everything is connected, and anything can be known through the right ritual and connections (Oswalt 55). Psychic belief ultimately results in a separation from God as the individual relies increasingly on their own resources rather than on God. This self-sufficiency is diametrically opposed to the holiness to which God calls his people.

Scripture clearly condemns the use of psychics and divination. Kaufmann describes this condemnation:

> The Bible does not condemn wisdom and science at large (for they are divine gifts to man); it bans only the occult science of magic that enables man to work wonders without recourse to God, thus feeding his ambition "to become like God." (79)

Not surprisingly, this ambition to become like God is also a fundamental aspect of the continuity worldview (Oswalt 66).

Ultimately, psychic teachings blind people from seeing God's presence, and from seeing the *imago Dei*. Paul states this specifically in a letter to the Corinthians: "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). Participation in psychic teachings warps and distorts one's understanding.

Because of this potential distortion, scripture explicitly warns against actively engaging in psychic activities. John teaches that not all spirits should be believed because many are not from God (1 John 4:1-6). Peter warns similarly, reminding that prophecy does not come from humanity, but only from God (2 Pet. 1:16, 19-21). Christians should not turn to divination to explain supernatural events.

Ministry to supernatural explainers must offer both a confirmation of the reality of supernatural events and explanations of those events within a Christian worldview. Like other groups studied, supernatural explainers longed for a world beyond rationality. If Christian churches do not acknowledge and recognize the supernatural, individuals will seek answers elsewhere. However, to the degree that pastors and churches recognize and articulate the existence of the supernatural, individuals will have a context and vocabulary to understand the supernatural events they encounter.

Recognizing and naming the supernatural does not necessarily imply acceptance. While some supernatural events, such as miracles, should be welcomed in recognition of God's healing work in the world, other supernatural events are not of God, and should be avoided. Not all supernatural events are equal, and Christians must be taught discernment in order to recognize God's actions from those that are not of God.

Discernment should be part of the spiritual formation of all Christians. Discernment recognizes that God does continue to act in the world and helps individuals recognize God's touch in the actions and events around them. Discernment helps individuals see the sacred in the midst of the secular.

Too Many Answers and Not Enough Questions

He arrived in the youth group full of questions. Indeed, his first question led to a second, and then a third. He seemed to overflow with questions. He thoroughly scrutinized answers that were offered by the adult leaders, and he quickly pounced on any apparent inconsistencies. Each answer led in quick succession to yet another question.[6]

Almost all of the interviewees described a similar approach to questioning their faith. Indeed, many especially appreciated the willingness of their parish communities to entertain and encourage their process of questioning. Some described previous painful experiences in which their questioning had met with disapproval or even condemnation. Questioning was not just a means of incorporating new beliefs, but an integral part of who these individuals understood themselves to be.

The interviewees described this questioning in a number of different ways. One said, "My siblings ... all seem to have similar views about religion and its place ... and we all seem to be more interested in the questions than in the answers,... which is what I think has drawn me to this Episcopal Church." Another commented, "I'm not afraid to sit down and talk with the minister or friends that happen to be studying or doing the same thing I am or having the same difficulty with a term or a phrase. So I guess ... inquiring minds want to know." A third individual simply said, "I have questions every day." Questioning defined their identity.

The ability to doubt formed an important part of their questioning. One described the importance of doubt in her own life:

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[6] The individual described here is based on a blended view of the survey and interview responses, as well as personal experience.

> Whenever I run up against something that is hard and fast and all of that, you know, "This is the way it is," I just look at it like ... "I don't think so." If there's no room for doubt, there needs to be.

Doubt was an important aspect of questioning.

Finally, many of the interviewees were suspicious of answers that seemed too doctrinaire, or too rigid. One said, "[T]o me it's like a personal front of saying your way is the only way.... It's the only way to get to heaven." Another commented, "I think that there are far too many answers and not nearly enough questions." Questions remained more important than answers.

Unfortunately, churches are often not seen as places where questioning or doubting is approved, much less encouraged. Kinnaman describes this same pattern in his research:

> A generation of young Christians believes that the churches in which they were raised are not safe and hospitable places to express doubts. Many feel that they have been offered slick or half-baked answers to their thorny honest questions, and they are rejecting the "talking heads" and "talking points" they see among the older generations. (11)

Indeed, outsiders often perceive Christians as close-minded. Kinnaman and Lyons describe the perception that Christians reject both thinking and curiosity:

> Many outsiders believe Christianity insulates people from thinking. Often young people (including many insiders) doubt that Christianity boosts intellect.... Christianity is not generally perceived to sanction a thoughtful response to the world. One comment illustrates this image: "Christianity stifles curiosity. People become unwilling to face their doubts and questions. It makes people brain-dead." The vast majority of outsiders reject the idea that Christianity "makes sense" or is "relevant to their life." So part of the sheltered perception is that Christians are not thinkers. (123)

In the minds of many, thinking and Christianity do not mix.

Interestingly, many researchers believe this kind of questioning that must occur for a person to reach an achieved identity status. Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer describe a

searching for information that is associated with the moratorium identity status (383), as individuals explore possible identities. Kinnaman and Lyons describe the importance of thinking in faith development:

> One of the primary reasons that ministry to teenagers fails to produce a lasting faith is because they are not being taught to think. This gets to the core of the get-saved perception: young people experience a one-size-fits-all message that fails to connect with their unique sensibilities, personality, or intellectual capabilities. Your people desperately need to be taught to process the rich complexities of life, to probe and test and stretch their faith from the perspective of a Christ follower. (81)

Questioning and probing can lead to a stronger faith. The questioning described by the interviewees in this study may be the pursuit of a greater understanding of their faith or a habitual approach to life, in general, and spirituality, in particular.

These findings raise the issue of whether questioning should always be associated with moratorium, or whether questioning can play a healthy role in individuals with an achieved identity status as well. Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer provide some insight into this topic as well, pointing out that individuals in moratorium tend to avoid information that might confirm their beliefs, whereas individuals in foreclosure seek confirmatory information (383). Only individuals who had reached the achieved identity status looked for both confirming and disconfirming information. This tendency provides important insights into the use of questioning in identity formation. To the degree that an agenda exists in the questioning—whether searching for only confirming or only disconfirming data—then the individual is most likely not in an achieved identity status. Only the achieved individual will be willing to receive both confirming and disconfirming data in their questioning.

Scripture describes questioning as well and provides testimony to the number of questions asked of Jesus. For instance, his disciples asked why the scribes said that Elijah would come first (Matt. 17:10). They questioned him about his parables (Mark 4:10; 7:17). They even asked about their own failures (Mark 9:28). Their questioning did not dismay Jesus.

However, not all questioning is equal. The Bible also provides examples of people questioning in their hearts. Mark reports that the scribes questioned in their hearts (Mark 2:6), as does Luke of the Pharisees (Luke 5:21). In both cases Jesus confronted them, asking, "Why do you question in your hearts?" (Mark 2:8; Luke 5:22). Jesus recognized that their interests lay less in true understanding and more in entrapment. Interestingly, in both cases Jesus answered their questions.

Finally, Christians are explicitly told to seek. Jesus said, "And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" (Luke 11:9-10). God honors and responds to seeking when done in faith. Questioning can lead to both clarity and spiritual maturity.

Church leaders should encourage questioning as a method to grow in spiritual maturity. Questions provide a means of clarifying one's beliefs. Kinnaman and Lyons describe the importance of questioning in faith development:

> A faith that does not effectively address convoluted and thorny issues seems out of tune with a generation asking big questions and expressing candid doubts. Spirituality that is merely defined as "dos and don'ts" rings hollow. (126)

This encouragement is especially significant given the importance of questioning in the moratorium identity status.

However, the reasons for questioning are important as well. Questioners should not focus entirely on the search for disconfirming data. Questioners can be encouraged and guided towards healthy and appropriate questioning. When supported and guided in their questioning, this process can become an important part of maturing faith and spiritual identity.

Exploration and Commitment

Raised as a Christian, she had spent several years exploring other spiritual traditions. These other faiths had been interesting, and she had learned a lot, but she found herself drawn instead back to the Christianity of her youth. Even as she returned to Christianity, she continued to explore, or at least consider, other faiths.[7]

Most of those interviewed for this study reported years of exploration of different faiths. Most had belonged to more than one faith over the years. Most now considered themselves Christians. One described her spiritual journey:

> My beliefs have changed so obviously I've been able to release some and include different ones. Like, for example, I was able to release that idea that Jesus could ... be a regular person. And then at some point I allowed for the fact that he was not a regular person. And I allowed for the whole traditional Christian story to be true, at least as much as anything can be true on this plane of consciousness.

Others described the "evolving" of their beliefs. Almost all of the respondents described both exploration and commitment in the development of their spiritual beliefs. In other words, they described what appears to be an achieved identity status.

Based on Eriksonian identity theory, Marcia proposed four identity statuses: diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. These four statuses can be mapped

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[7] The individual described here is based on a blended view of the survey and interview responses, as well as personal experience.

into quadrants based on the axes of exploration and commitment. Research indicates that over time individuals tend to move from diffusion and foreclosure and into moratorium and achieved identity statuses.

Based on the descriptions of their faith journeys, many of those interviewed had spent a considerable amount of time in moratorium, exploring possible faiths. Many continued to identify strongly with the need to question and wrestle with their faith, an attribute that is more closely associated with moratorium. Most of those interviewed also described a commitment to their Christian faith that was inconsistent with moratorium yet consistent with an achieved identity status. To complicate the picture, several individuals also described multi-year commitments to earlier non-Christian faiths that, at least in retrospect, also look like an achieved identity status.

These results raise the following issues regarding identity statuses:

- The achieved identity status does not appear to be permanent. An individual may regress from an achieved identity status and return to moratorium, foreclosure, or diffusion.
- Other aspects of identity statuses, beyond exploration and commitment, that might better explain these results should be explored.
- Individuals may create an identity that is indeed achieved but that also lacks any commitment to any particular faith.
- Identity statuses may be particularly tied to adolescent and young adult identities. These same statuses may not hold in the same way across the lifespan.

Each of these questions will be addressed separately.

Identity status regression. Several studies exist that indicate that an individual can regress from an identity status, particularly the achieved status. For instance, Kroger, Martinussen, and Marcia proposed that individuals may regress to a "safer" status following a period of exploration (693). They also argue that regression may be used to reinvigorate identity commitments. Finally, individuals may return to earlier identity statuses when the identity they have chosen proves "difficult to implement" (694).

Some researchers have looked at the further development of identity in adulthood, and the impact it has upon identity statuses. Joel R. Sneed, Susan Krauss Whitbourne, and Michelle E. Culang found evidence that identity, and therefore identity statuses, continue to evolve even into adulthood (155). This continuity is consistent with the research of Joanne Stephen, Eugene Fraser, and James E. Marcia. They found that adults often go through cycles of moratorium and achievement, particularly when facing challenging life events (286). These moratorium/achievement cycles may especially occur as individuals move into the later Eriksonian ego stages of intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation, and integrity versus despair.

These studies indicate that individuals can and do regress from previous identity statuses. The individuals interviewed for this study may be demonstrating these moratorium/achievement cycles in their own identity statuses. Arguing against this idea, however, is the sheer number of cycles that would be required to explain their different faiths over time adequately and the lack of clear indications that these individuals were moving into the later Eriksonian ego stages related to intimacy, generativity, and integrity.

Identity status components. Marcia originally developed a two-factor model of commitment and exploration. Researchers since have proposed various modifications. Wim Meeus et al. proposed differentiating between in-depth exploration and reconsideration, in which commitments are changed (1567). Based on this differentiation, the foreclosure identity status is divided into early closure, in which the individual has not engaged in any exploration, and closure, in which some exploration has occurred, and the individual has returned to a low-exploration state (1568). Elisabetta Crocetti et al. argue in favor of adding a fifth identity status, searching moratorium (986). Meeus et al. describe this searching moratorium: "Adolescents in this status have strong commitments and explore them intensively, but they are also very active in considering alternative commitments" (1567). The searching moratorium status more accurately describes the spiritual journeys of the individuals in this study than does an achieved status. Rather than demonstrating the commitment that goes with true identity status achievement, they are instead exhibiting the commitment of an individual in the searching moratorium identity status. The searching moratorium status is also consistent with their ongoing stance of questioning, as well as the number of different faiths with which they have been involved. Instead of a moratorium/achievement cycle, these individuals are more or less permanently in a searching moratorium status.

If indeed searching moratorium is the most appropriate identity status important implications can be identified. Crocetti et al. describe the searching moratorium status as more positive than regular moratorium in that it is "characterized by the possibility to explore new commitments from the relatively secure basis of an articulated, existing commitment" (986). They go on to add, "Adolescents in the moratorium status are

looking for a commitment they have not yet made, where adolescents in the searching moratorium status are revising their identity because they find their existing commitments unsatisfactory." However, their optimism may not be well founded, particularly in terms of Christian spiritual identity. Certainly in adulthood the searching moratorium identity status may indicate a commitment to an ongoing and never-ending cycle of spiritual seeking rather than a commitment to a true mature spiritual identity, expressed through Christian faith.

Arguing against searching moratorium as the identity status of those included in this study are their descriptions of commitment, including periods that were devoid of any apparent, or at least active, searching. At least for a time, many of those interviewed described periods of significant commitment. These commitments were ultimately replaced by other commitments. Because of their periods of identity commitment, searching moratorium may not be the best description of their identity statuses.

Alternative identities. Another option exists to explain the apparent multiple faiths with an achieved identity status. While a one-to-one correspondence may exist between a person's identity and their spiritual tradition, this relationship may not actually hold for those interviewed as part of this study. Instead, these individuals may have created an achieved identity of *spiritual seeker,* which transcends any particular faith. In this case, spiritual traditions could be swapped out with only minimal impact to a person's identity.

While some support for identities unattached to any particular faith can be found in the data collected as part of this study, this conclusion seems unlikely. If their identity transcends any particular faith, one would expect a fairly regular turnover in traditions,

denominations, and/or churches. With one exception this pattern did not exist. Instead, many of those interviewed had made multi-year commitments to individual churches and were highly invested in those communities.

Other aspects of Eriksonian identity theory. Identity achievement is not the end goal of Erikson's ego stages. As only the fifth stage, identity achievement is followed by stages addressing intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation, and integrity versus despair (*Childhood* 229-33). However, theorists may become focused on identity achievement, and lose sight of the later stages. In addition, confirmation is needed on whether the later stages also apply to spiritual development.

Because Erikson concentrated on overall development, his description of the intimacy stage focuses on the intimacy of the individual with another person, particularly in terms of sexuality (*Childhood* 229). Spiritual intimacy does not share this same emphasis. Instead, spiritual intimacy could be experienced either in terms of others or with God. In support of the former, many of those interviewed spoke at length about the importance of community. Discussions of intimacy with God were less common, with the exception of the individual who recognized a need to develop a personal relationship with Jesus. Perhaps the dichotomy itself is false, and the spiritual goals of this stage are to experience intimacy with *both* God *and* neighbor. This conclusion is supported in Scripture by Jesus' injunction to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-39). This call to intimacy may be why community played such an important role in so many of the

spiritual journeys. Once individuals accept their identity in Christ, they are called to intimacy.

Following intimacy, Erikson describes the next stage as generativity, in which one must address the crisis between generativity and stagnation: "Generativity is primarily the interest in establishing and guiding the next generation" (*Childhood* 131). Again, Erikson is writing generally, and generativity itself may not apply to spiritual growth. Interestingly, some of those interviewed pointed to teaching, particularly in terms of Bible studies or Sunday school, as indications of their spiritual growth. If Erikson is correct, then increasing spiritual maturity results in a desire to share one's faith. No longer is intimacy enough; now one must serve.

Surprisingly, confirmation for the concept of spiritual generativity comes from research on identity status. One study found that individuals with an achieved status were more likely to engage in both service to others and service to God: "Achieved status individuals are more successful in integrating the two dimensions of faith maturity: service to humanity and service of self to a transcendent reality" (Sanders 657). This statement seems to support the extension of Erikson's generativity stage to spiritual maturity as well.

Several of those interviewed described their service within the church. This service included leading worship, teaching Sunday school, and sitting on church boards. Most described their service in terms of service to others. Few spoke in terms of service to God.

Erikson's final stage was ego integrity, characterized by a crisis between integrity and despair. Interestingly enough, Erikson defines this stage in part in terms of

spirituality: "It is a post-narcissistic love of the human ego—not the self—as an experience which conveys some world order and spiritual sense, no matter how dearly paid for" (*Childhood* 232). A person who has integrity does not fear death.

Of all Erikson's stages, this eighth stage is perhaps the most explicitly spiritual. While some of those interviewed discussed integrity in regards to their identity, none described anything that could be easily identified with the integrity stage as defined by Erikson. Whether this absence indicates a lack of correspondence between the general stage and the spiritual stage is unclear. Alternatively, those interviewed may not have reached or even approached this stage, so that it never came up as a topic of discussion. Overall, neither the literature nor this study demonstrate much support for this spiritual stage. However, this lack of support does not mean that it does not exist, only that no support is available at this time.

However a biblical perspective provides some support. Scripture states that humankind was made in the *imago Dei* (Gen. 1:27). Given this description, Erikson's stages can be examined in the context of the Trinity. Obviously the Trinity demonstrates a great degree of trust and autonomy. Certainly the Trinity shows initiative, although *industry* is perhaps an interesting term to use in regards to the Trinity. The Trinity clearly exhibits intimacy, generativity, and integrity. Overall, then, Erikson's stages are aligned with attributes that can be found in the Trinity.

While spirituality certainly imbues Erikson's writings, he did not write from an explicitly Christian worldview. His stages lack any articulation of redemption, renewal, or sanctification, at least through God's agency. In this lack Erikson falls short of the scriptural expression of renewal. For instance, Paul writes, "So we do not lose heart.

Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). Erikson does not, in general, provide for an "outer" or "old" self (Col. 3:9-10) that is wasting away, even as the *imago Dei* is being renewed in the individual by God.

Scripture does have a sense of maturity. Paul writes, "So we continue to preach Christ to each person, using all wisdom to warn and to teach everyone, in order to bring each one into God's presence as a mature person in Christ" (Col. 1:28, NCV). Other passages testify to maturity as well. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature" (1 Cor. 14:20). To the Ephesians Paul offered his most eloquent description of spiritual maturity:

> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. (Eph. 4:11-14)

Unity of faith and knowledge of Jesus characterize Christian spiritual maturity, not belief in pagan doctrine.

Taking together both the literature and the Scripture on identity and maturity, those interviewed for this study cannot be characterized as having reached a mature spiritual identity. While they demonstrate both exploration and commitment, considerable questioning continues and their spiritual commitments have a history of being tenuous. The present identity statuses and their dimensions, as defined by Marcia, may not adequately or completely explain the identities of spiritual seekers.

Identity Statuses Revisited

Marcia's identity statuses, defined particularly in terms of commitment and exploration, may not provide the best explanation for the data. Marcia based his identity statuses on the developmental psychodynamic theories of Erikson (see Figure 5.1). While Erikson often mentions commitment as a component of identity statuses (*Identity and the Life Cycle* 119, 123; *Identity Youth and Crisis* 155, 157, 160, 165), he explicitly mentions exploration only a few times (*Identity and the Life Cycle* 186), although he does discuss experimentation (*Identity and the Life Cycle* 127; *Identity Youth and Crisis* 156, 158). Furthermore, while important for the exploration and consolidation of identity, *ongoing* exploration may not be a healthy part of mature adult identity. Other explicit aspects of individual development may better define identity status instead of exploration.

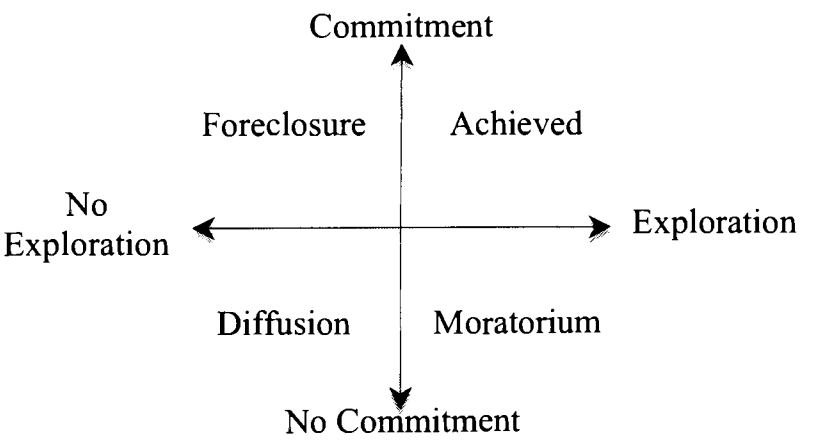

Figure 5.1. Marcia's identity statuses based on commitment and exploration.

For instance, Erikson often mentions integration (*Identity and the Life Cycle* 63; *Identity, Youth, and Crisis* 81, 102, 128, 209). Erikson comments, "Clinical and anthropological evidence suggest that the lack or loss of this accrued ego integration is

signified by *disgust* and by *despair*: fate is not accepted as the frame of life, death not as its finite boundary" (original emphasis; *Identity Youth and Crisis* 140). Integration may provide a better descriptor of mature identity than exploration.

Another option for understanding identity statuses is social. Erikson's theory is explicitly psychosocial, yet the social is only peripherally addressed in Marcia's identity statuses. The inclusion of a social aspect in the identity statuses may not only result in better alignment with other identity theories such as systems theory (Poll and Smith 131) but may also provide a more robust model for evaluating identity status.

Other researchers have noted issues with the original identity statuses and have made modifications. For instance, Gregory A. Valde found that the identity status of foreclosure inadequately explained the experiences of individuals who returned to the foreclosed state after a period of identity achievement. To address this inadequcy, Valde split the foreclosure status into two statuses: closure and foreclosure. Closure occurred when an individual retreated from earlier achieved or moratorium identity statuses and returned to a foreclosed, or *re-closed* status. Individuals in a closed status found previous identity commitments no longer viable. In contrast, foreclosure happened only when an individual made a commitment to a particular identity without any exploration. To accommodate this fifth identity status, Valde added a third axis to the model: openness to ongoing exploration. Because Marcia's original model was inadequate to explain the data, Valde proposed a reworking of the model to include adding this fifth status of closure.

Koen Luyckx, Kuc Goossens, Bart Soenens, Wim Beyers, and Maarten Vansteenkiste also found issues with Marcia's conception of identity statuses. Using a

factor analytic model, they identified five different statuses, but unlike Valde, they split the diffused status (611-12). Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Byers, and Vansteenkiste found four different dimensions, rather than Marcia's two dimensions of exploration and commitment. Instead, they identified dimensions of exploration in breadth, exploration in depth, commitment making, and identification with commitment. These new dimensions resulted in the old status of diffusion being split into two new statuses: carefree diffusion and diffused diffusion. Carefree diffusion was characterized by moderate commitment making, low exploration in breadth, low exploration in depth, and low to moderate identification with their commitment (612). Interestingly, Marcia had alluded to this difference in the diffused status, describing diffused individuals as either the "playboy" or the schizoid personality type (558). However, because Marcia's original model was inadequate to explain the data, Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Byers, and Vansteenkiste updated the model and split the diffused status into carefree diffusion and diffused diffusion, and added two more dimensions to accommodate these statuses.

Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Byers, and Vansteenkiste's four dimensions were expanded to five dimensions in a follow-up study (Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky, Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Smits, and Goossens 75). Based on further data, a fifth dimension of ruminative exploration was added. This ruminative exploration was considered to be largely maladaptive, involving considerable self-questioning (76). This model was a further extension of Marcia's original identity statuses.

Elisabetta Crocetti, Monica Rubini, and Wim Meeus also questioned Marcia's two-factor identity status model. Based on their research, they identified three factors: commitment, in-depth exploration, and reconsideration of commitment (218). These

factors also led to five different identity statuses, but unlike Valde's split of foreclosure and Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Byers, and Vansteenkiste's split of diffusion, Crocetti et al. argue for a split in moratorium. In their model an identity status of "searching moratorium" was split from moratorium and included individuals who had made a commitment but continued to explore and revise those commitments actively (992). Finding Marcia's original model inadequate, Crocetti et al. also reworked identity statuses to align them more closely with their actual data.

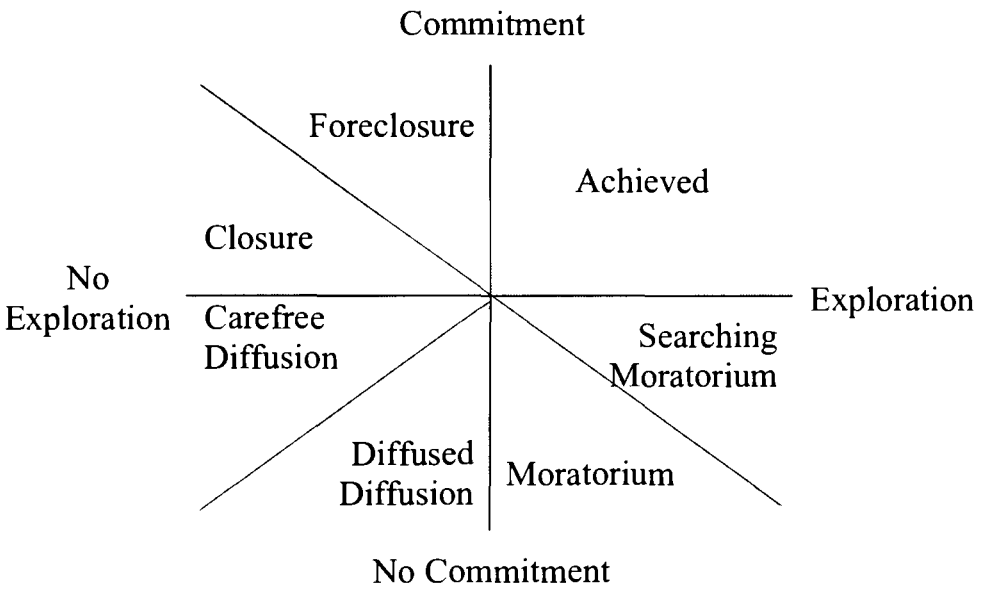

Figure 5.2. Identity statuses as revised by Valde, Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Byers, and Vansteenkiste and Crocetti et al.

These four studies all agree that Marcia's original formulation of the identity statuses was not sufficient for explaining the data researchers encountered. All four studies added one or more dimensions to Marcia's model to account for those differences. While these researchers generally agree that the dimensions remain within the realms of

exploration and commitment, the number and configuration of these dimensions differs significantly (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1. Identity Status Dimension as Identified by Different Researchers

Researcher	Identity Status Dimensions				
Marcia	Exploration			Commitment	
Valde	Exploration			Commitment	Openness to ongoing exploration
Crocetti, Rubini, Meeus	Exploration			Commitment	Reconsideration of commitment
Luyckx, Goossens, et al.	Exploration in breadth		Exploration in depth	Commitment making	Identification with commitment
Luyckx, Schwartz, et al.	Exploration in breadth	Exploration in depth	Ruminative Exploration	Commitment making	Identification with commitment

However, these may not be the best dimensions to use in explaining identity statuses. For instance, commitment generally represents a decision made, perhaps over a period of time, to choose a particular identity. Exploration generally represents a process, rather than a state. Furthermore, active exploration may not be a part of a mature identity, spiritual or otherwise. Certainly past exploration is important, but ongoing exploration may be neither useful nor necessary once a mature identity has been achieved.

Furthermore, the results of this study also raise questions about the formulation of the identity statuses, particularly moratorium and achievement. Based on these results, individuals are either cycling back and forth between the moratorium and achieved identity statuses, as described by Stephen, Fraser, and Marcia (296); creating a spiritual identity that does not require commitment to any particular faith; or, remaining in statuses

and their underlying dimensions, as presently described, that fail to represent the full picture. Based on the results of Valde, Crocetti et al., Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, Byers, and Vansteenkiste, and Luyckx, Schwartz, Berzonsky, Soenens, Vansteenkiste, Smits, and Goossens, the latter conclusion is most likely correct. However, this conclusion does not eliminate the two other options; multiple explanations may apply here.

One option for reworking Marcia's identity statuses would require replacing the exploration axis with an axis measuring flexibility. Lack of flexibility would be associated with rigidity, an unwillingness to engage in appropriate exploration, and with a black and white view of the world. Flexibility would allow for, but not permanently require, both exploration and experimentation. Flexibility in identity would allow for an individual's identity to be held with an open hand rather than with the closed fist of rigidity. Flexibility would encourage not only exploration but also a nuanced understanding of one's identity. Flexibility allows for creativity and elaboration in the expression of one's identity.

However, commitment and flexibility alone cannot adequately explain the results of this study. As the studies noted earlier found, a third axis is necessary to explain the apparent cycling between statuses that appears to occur for many individuals. Some of the studies added a dimension related to commitment, calling it either reconsideration of commitment or identification with commitment. These seem to be the reverse of the same concept, related to the degree to which commitment to a particular identity pervades individuals' sense of who they are. Therefore, pervasiveness may be a better description of this axis of identity status.

Pervasiveness refers to the degree to which individuals' chosen identity pervades their beings. Another way to describe this pervasiveness would be the integration of one's identity. For instance, an individual's identity informs and influences the whole of the person, rather than being one of many identities that the individual holds. A non-pervasive and non-integrated identity would be similar to the self-conceptions described by Markus and Kunda (865) in which a variety of simultaneous self-conceptions are possible. A pervasive and integrated identity would be more aligned with Erikson's understanding of mature identity. Indeed, Erikson writes specifically about "the gradual integration of self-images which culminates in a sense of identity" (*Identity Youth and Crisis* 209). Pervasiveness and integration represent one aspect of mature identity (see Figure 5.3).

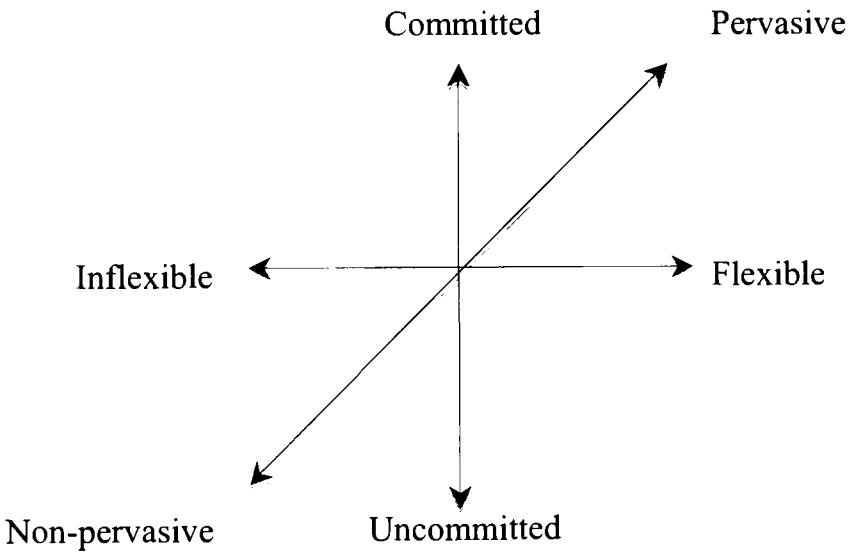

Figure 5.3. New identity dimensions.

An identity that is both flexible and committed may not pervade the whole being of a person. If it does not then an individual could, over time, make a number of different

commitments to different identities. Only as the identity becomes integrated does the commitment to that identity becomes permanent. For instance, Erikson comments, "The lack or loss of this accrued ego integration is signified by fear of death: the one and only life cycle is not accepted as the ultimate of life" (*Childhood* 232). Elsewhere Erikson states, "The integration of ... all the following [stages] results, in adulthood, in a combination of faith and realism" (*Identity Youth and Crisis* 102). Commitment indicates intention but cannot guarantee practice. Only as the identity is integrated into the behaviors and beliefs of the individual does it become increasingly stable.

However, an integrated, committed, and flexible identity is not monolithic. Indeed, an individual faced with life events and crises will respond and their sense of self will grow and adapt, yet their core identity will remain unchanged. A flexible and integrated identity should be able to adjust to life's challenges, without losing its core.

Given the dimensions of commitment, flexibility, and pervasiveness, the identity statuses derived so far may be mapped onto these axes. Researchers have only noted seven possible identity statuses, but with the addition of pervasiveness, an eighth status can now be defined. This status takes the achieved status, which includes both commitment and flexibility, and adds to it pervasiveness. When individuals' identities include commitment, flexibility, and pervasiveness, they will be considered to have an *integrated* identity status (see Table 5.2).

Table 5.2. Identity Statuses Categorized by Flexibility, Commitment, and Pervasiveness

	Committed		Uncommitted	
	Flexible	**Inflexible**	**Flexible**	**Inflexible**
Pervasive	Integrated	Foreclosure	Moratorium	Carefree Diffusion
Non-Pervasive	Achieved	Closure	Searching Moratorium	Diffused Diffusion

Unfortunately the data in this study does not include enough individuals in each of these identity statuses to confirm whether the addition of a pervasive dimension is appropriate across all the identity statuses. However, differentiating the integrated identity status from the achieved identity status based on pervasiveness is consistent with the descriptions of identity provided by those interviewed for this study. The pervasive dimension also explains why some individuals appear to remain in the moratorium, foreclosed, or diffused identity statuses.

Finally, identity theorists may ask whether these dimensions, and the addition of the integrated identity status, are consistent with Eriksonian theory. Erikson's emphasis on commitment and integration offers support for this approach to identity statuses and their dimensions. While Erikson does not explicitly address flexibility, his writings clearly allude to it:

> The ego integration now taking place in the form of ego identity is more than the sum of the childhood identifications. It is the accrued experience of the ego's ability to integrate these identifications with the vicissitudes of the libido, with the aptitudes developed out of endowment, and with the opportunities offered in social roles. The sense of ego identity, then, is the accrued confidence that the inner sameness and continuity are matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others.... (*Childhood* 228)

These three dimensions of commitment, flexibility, and pervasiveness, and the identity statuses that result are consistent with Erikson's developmental stages.

Belong/Believe/Behave

She never thought she would become a Christian. Christians were so rigid, so angry, and so opinionated. She had tried different faiths, but none felt quite right. Then a friend invited her to worship, and she went reluctantly, hesitantly. Something, or perhaps someone, spoke to her in the midst of the worship, and she found herself drawn to it, even though she was not entirely sure what she was feeling drawn to. But something was drawing her into this Christian community.

The more she came to worship, the more she felt like she belonged here. Slowly, cautiously, she began to trust the people around her. She found herself longing to be a part of this community, to belong. As she became more and more a part of the community, she found her beliefs beginning to change, to evolve. Finally one day she was ready to call herself a follower of Jesus. She was not sure where she was going, and she still was not sure how much she really believed, but she was sure that she belonged. She belonged here.[8]

Many of the interviewees in this study described, in poignant terms, the importance of Christian community. Some had been a part of a church or Christian community all their lives. Others did not discover community until well into adulthood. Some had thought that Christian community was the last thing in the world they either needed or wanted. Almost all of those interviewed expressed the importance of their church family to their faith.

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[8] The individual described here is based on a blended view of the survey and interview responses, as well as personal experience.

Spiritual seekers, especially, spoke about the power of being welcomed into Christian community. One commented, "I didn't know ... how important it is to have a community. I mean I sensed it, but more from a feeling ... but not from a feeling of knowing what it is." Another person said, "And I'm incredibly deeply grateful for having found a church.... I found spiritual community." These individuals found a place where they belonged, and often were surprised to discover that place was a Christian church.

Several individuals commented on the power of being known. One said, "What makes it possible for me to continue going there is that I have been invited, encouraged ... to show myself. I have [been] valued for my difference. Not shunned for my difference." Another articulated the same feeling: "And it's been interesting to find a place where I can go and people know who I am and they're glad to see me.... And I've been going there for over 10 years, and I'm only just now beginning to trust that they're glad to see me." Their churches offered a community where they could both know and be known.

For some interviewees community happened within the context of the liturgy. One individual described the invitation to communion that is part of her community: "And the language at [the] service says, at nearly every service—not every single service—but when it is spoken, it says, 'All are welcome. This is God's table.' All are welcome here." She experienced this welcoming as a powerful invitation to encounter God.

This sense of being welcomed was striking among many of those interviewed, but it raises some important theological issues. Often Christians communicate, either intentionally or unintentionally, that a person must believe and behave before they can

belong to a church. Individuals who hold awkward or even heretical beliefs are welcome, as long as they are willing to discard those beliefs for approved doctrines. Behavior, too, must quickly align with Christian morals and ethics. Failure to do so results in censure.

In this model, belonging can only occur once an individual has embraced orthodox belief and ethical behavior. In other words, belief leads to correct behavior, which only then results in belonging. Belonging can only occur once belief and behavior are correctly aligned.

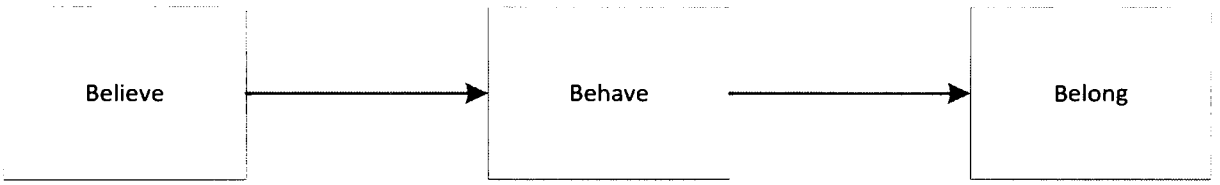

Figure 5.4. The believe/behave/belong approach to Christian community.

Those interviewed for this study described a different pattern. In this approach, belonging comes first, preceding both belief and behavior. Welcomed into a community, members find their faith quickening. Beliefs begin to change, becoming more aligned with those of the community. Changes in belief then lead to changes in behavior.

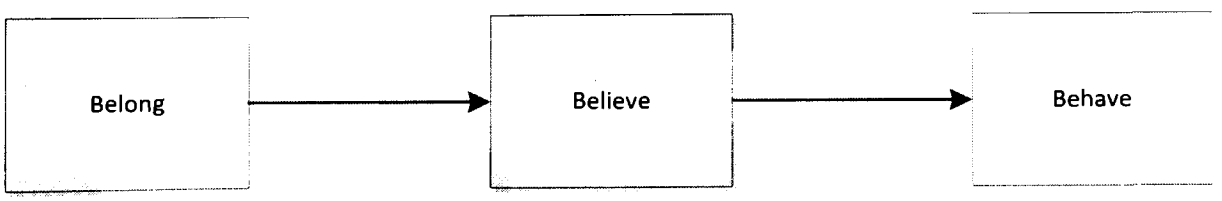

Figure 5.5. The belong/believe/behave approach to Christian community.

Indeed, those interviewed for this study described exactly this process. As involvement with their church community increased, their beliefs began to change as well. One individual described her decision to be baptized, after years of resisting baptism:

> But what happened at this annual meeting was that they voted on the vestry, and it was a voice vote, and [the priest] read down the list of who could vote. And the first thing was baptized members of the church,... the first thing on the list! I met everything except the first thing on the list! And no one would have known if I had spoken a vote. [But] my God would have known! I would have known! And I was not entitled to vote at the place where I worshipped. And I walked out of there,... and I said, "I'm done being on the outside of this. I'm done. I'm steppin' in." And I got baptized on Easter eve.... And... it was not, "I got to get baptized." It was, "I'm done being ... on the outside. I'm tired of looking at it this way. I'm going to be on the other side of it. I'm going to be part of this group. I am part of this group. I'll just be part of this group." It was pretty strange, as I look back on it. It was pretty darn strange!

Another person described feeling comfortable with God, but wrestling with Jesus, and realizing that she needed to develop a relationship with him:

> [I'm] working on trying to develop a relationship with Jesus instead of just God. I think [it] will help with that baggage, that hesitancy that I have, and the negativity that comes with it, because it really doesn't need to have that.

Later in the interview she again discussed a desire for Jesus:

> I'm intrigued about Jesus, and how I have kind of a hang up about Jesus, sort of and Christianity. I'm finding that definitely curious. And I think with [the priest's] sermons and talking about developing a relationship and ... your spiritual journey.... I think I get that now, and I feel like I want to go there with Jesus. I'm just not sure how to do that, and I think I'm scared,... but I do think I want to develop a relationship.

From a largely nonbeliever beginning, through the workings of belonging to a community, both of these women were experiencing an evolution of belief towards increased orthodoxy.

Finally, for some of those interviewed the process of belonging and believing led to changes in behavior. One woman described the changes in her actions and behavior as her connection to community increased:

> So I do a lot of stuff there, and it doesn't feel like a burden, it's more like a joy.... [B]efore I was very protective of my time, and wasn't willing to,... be committed to doing things. Cause it seemed ... invasive.... I've made this change that I find that the more I give, the more I receive,... the more fuller my life is, instead of my attitude before was,... I'm not gonna do this or this.... [P]eople are crazy giving up their lives to do ... kinda all that. I just kind of made this shift, and then see how much richer my life is actually because of that.

For this woman belonging led to changes in both beliefs and behavior that left her with a new and fuller sense of life.

This same process is attested to in Scripture. Paul encouraged the Ephesians to let their changes in beliefs be expressed in their behavior: "Take on an entirely new way of life—a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you" (Eph. 4:22-24, MSG). This passage is not the only example. Over and over again in scripture Jesus invited people to belong to him, and only then did he begin to address their beliefs and behavior. Included in this list were Simon Peter and Andrew (Matt. 4:18), James and John (Matt. 4:19), Levi the tax collector (Mark 2:14), and Bartimaeus, the blind beggar (Mark 10:46-52). All were invited to follow Jesus, to *belong* to Jesus, even before Jesus addressed their beliefs or behavior.

None of Jesus' invitations to belong should be surprising. God is, ultimately, a relational God. The Trinity is, at its core, relational. Humanity, being made in the image of God, is relational as well. If individuals yearn to embrace their humanity fully, particularly in terms of the *imago Dei*, it must be done within the context of Christian

community. They must *belong* to be truly transformed into the image and likeness of God.

Furthermore, community is an important part of spiritual identity. Mullikin argues that identity must be formed in the midst of community (179). Grenz also endorses the importance of community and offers it as a means of connecting with the transcendent (94). Community, particularly Christian community, plays a fundamental role in the spiritual formation of individuals.

Two challenges are associated with the process of belong/believe/behave. First, if individuals are invited to belong exactly as they are, warts, questionable beliefs, and all, they must also be both encouraged and challenged to move towards orthodox belief. To remain where they are and to fail to grow in faith reduces Christian community to a country club. Catechesis and spiritual formation must become an integral and intentional part of the process.

Second, belonging to a Christian community cannot be automatically assumed to indicate that an individual is also following Jesus. While most of those who belong do follow Jesus, a welcoming community cannot automatically assume that everyone who arrives at their doors is indeed a Christian. Because not everyone who enters the church is a Christian, some aspects of the community's life together will need to be retained only for those who have committed their lives to Christ. For instance, while some churches practice open communion, Scripture provides good reasons to limit the sacrament only to committed Christians. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, giving them instructions on the Lord's Supper within their community:

> For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had

> given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. (1 Cor. 11:23-29)

Participating in a sacrament without believing in the sacrament is to denigrate both the sacrament and the Lord. Open communion ultimately devalues communion by making it a source of cheap, and therefore meaningless, grace. Open communion fails to respect that God's people have been set apart from the world.

The Christian Church must find a way to be welcoming while also protecting the faith entrusted to it. This defense of the faith is no easy task. Fail to protect the faith, and the church risks becoming a country club, largely devoid of spiritual meaning. Fail to welcome, and the church will never grow, never receive new members into the body of Christ. The church must find a way to embrace both extremes at once.

Augustine provides one model for doing so. Worship included everyone, the baptized, the catechumens, and even people off the streets and consisted mainly of Scripture reading, preaching, and prayers (Harmless 160-90). The Eucharist was reserved for the baptized and took place apart from the open worship. No onlookers were allowed. Baptism followed an extensive period of catechesis. However, this catechesis took place largely within the worshiping community through the hearing of Augustine's sermons.

Augustine's sermons were boisterous and invited considerable audience participation. Harmless describes a typical sermon:

> Augustine's audience responded to his appeals with gusto—with thunderous applause, shouts, cries. In his day churchgoing was a raucous affair. The assembly would applaud whenever they recognized a favorite scripture verse. They would even interrupt and shout out the remainder of a verse he had begun to quote. They loved to show off their biblical expertise. Once, Augustine obliquely alluded to a man who, while "coming to marry a foreign-born wife," met a "roaring lion" and "strangled" it. The crowd immediately shouted, "Samson," before he could give the name. They would also try to outguess him, and when they saw him winding his way towards a favorite theme, they would begin shouting in anticipation. (168-69)

Augustine would often review previous sermon topics in an effort to consolidate his listeners' knowledge. Because of their nature, Augustine's sermons became catechetical events with significant audience involvement. Newcomers learned the proper responses by observation and could quickly join in. In doing so, they were unknowingly being catechized.

Researchers have questioned whether such an approach can work in the Western cultural milieu. The simplest answer is that it already has. Secular culture has attempted an approach similar to Augustine's and found it astonishingly effective. The cult classic, *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*,[9] has used exactly this kind of indirect learning to great effect. Newcomers to the movie quickly discover that the audience has a role in the movie experience. For instance, at one point Riff Raff, the servant, is asked whether his master is married. Riff Raff replies, "The Master is not yet married, nor do I think he ever will be. We are simply his," at which point the audience yells out "SLAVES!" and Riff Raff completes his sentence, "servants." The audience responds, "SAME THING!" Newcomers quickly learn the lines, many of which repeat throughout the movie. These same lines, or ones very like them, are used across the United States at midnight

[9] This description of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* should neither be considered an endorsement nor an encouragement to see the film. It is included only to illustrate a point about Western culture.

showings of the movie. Moviegoers across the country, from Sarasota, Florida, to Kirkland, Washington, will all know that servants and slaves are the same thing. Without setting out to learn anything intentionally, they have assimilated much.[10]

Augustine used a similar methodology to great effect. He engaged his audience, and they learned both Scripture and the catechism. Anyone could join in, at any time, and indeed people would often wander in off the streets to see what all the excitement was about. Through his preaching and catechetical style, Augustine created an environment that was welcoming to newcomer and experienced Christian alike.

However, baptism and the Eucharist were not included as topics, at least in any detail, in Augustine's sermons (Harmless 171). These topics were reserved for committed baptized Christians. Having completed the sermon, Augustine would pray over the catechumens, and all but the baptized would leave. Only those who had been baptized, who had committed themselves to Jesus, would partake of communion. For the rest, it remained a mystery.

However, while it remained a mystery, it was a mystery with an invitation. Augustine laced his sermons with allusions to the sacraments and always included an invitation for the unbaptized to join the ranks of the baptized (Harmless 171-72). In doing so, Augustine managed both to welcome newcomers and protect the gospel and the sacraments. Augustine found a way to encourage belonging and then followed with believing and behaving.

While this approach worked well for Augustine, the Western church may struggle to incorporate it. For instance, in the Episcopal Church, communion is a regular part of

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[10] I can personally testify to the effectiveness of this learning methodology. I saw *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* twice, over thirty years ago, and I can still chant some of the lines.

Sunday morning worship. The Eucharist cannot be easily separated from the rest of the service. Similarly, Augustine's preaching style may not translate well into the Episcopal Church because established congregations, at least, would not be open to such participatory preaching.

Augustine does, however, provide the inspiration and the proof that the church can be both welcoming and protective of word and sacrament at the same time. The actual implementation will depend on local context and congregations. The twenty-first century expression of this kind of community will be powerful indeed.

Implications of the Findings

The findings from this study address two particular areas: community and catechesis. Repeatedly respondents described finding a Christian community that welcomed them and drew them into faith, offering a setting in which they could put down spiritual roots and begin to grow in their Christian identity. Equally clearly, catechesis in the Christian faith was desperately needed both to combat prevailing New Age and paranormal influences and to clarify Christian doctrine. Paul, in his letter to the Colossians, describes this twofold process: "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Col. 2:6-7). Christians are called to reflect the light of the gospel, and in doing so believers need to encourage and invite others to belong, believe, and then behave.

Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations. First of all, the smaller sample sizes for both the online survey and the interviews limited the generalizability of the results. More

participants, particularly in states and denominations that were not represented in the collected data, would guarantee that the results are applicable for churches across the United States.

The use of a convenience sample, rather than a random sample, may also limit the generalizability of these results. Because all the pastors contacted to distribute the electronic survey were either known to the researcher or were the pastor of someone known to the researcher, the sample is not completely random. Increasing participation through a truly random sampling methodology could offer stronger results.

Finally, due to the low Baptist response rate and the less than random sample, Baptists were eliminated from the survey analyses. In general, Baptist pastors seemed to be leery of distributing the electronic survey to their congregations, and response rates were low. This reluctance may reflect a caution on the part of Baptists to participate in these kinds of online surveys. Finding a mechanism to distribute the electronic survey successfully to more Baptist churches would allow the inclusion of Baptists in the denominational statistics.

A second limitation of this study was the slightly older age of the respondents. According to the *CIA Factbook*, the median age in the United States is thirty-seven ("United States"). However, the median age of this sample was fifty-eight, and the younger decades were underrepresented. This underrepresentation may also skew the results. Given that younger adults are generally reported to have greater New Age and paranormal beliefs, the true incidence of New Age and paranormal beliefs may be underreported.

Third, the electronic survey instruments were difficult for some of the respondents. The black and white nature of the PB and SDS scale items, in particular, failed to capture the levels of gray that many respondents experienced. To complicate the issue further, Christians could answer some of the PB items in the affirmative with only slight nuances. For instance, some Christians find biblical support for believing in contact with those who have already died. Indeed, this statement was the PB item most commonly answered affirmatively by individuals with high SCO sores. Furthermore, some respondents qualified their answers by saying that with God anything is possible. Therefore, some overlap between Christian and New Age or paranormal concepts may have occurred.

Fourth, using only New Age and paranormal concepts may have underrepresented the true number of pagan and syncretistic beliefs. By not explicitly including beliefs from other religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, the true number of pagan beliefs was under counted. Because many Hindu and Buddhist beliefs are also included in New Age religions, many New Age concepts such as reincarnation were included in this study.

Fifth, while statistical correlations may discover relationships between variables, they cannot identify causality. A correlation "does not indicate that changes in the x variable *cause* [original emphasis] the changes in the y variable.... Causality must be demonstrated by an argument outside the statistical analysis. In many cases there may be no causality involved" (Dowdy and Weardon 261). Because of this limitation, the results of this study must be interpreted carefully and used cautiously.

Finally, insufficient data was collected with which to validate the reworked identity statuses and dimensions. Furthermore, the data that was available was qualitative

rather than quantitative. Further research to validate both the identity status dimensions and the identity statuses themselves is desperately needed.

Unexpected Observations

Several unexpected results were observed. First of all, the mean age of the survey respondents, at fifty-eight, was surprising. Given that that survey was Web based, the anticipation was that it would be, if anything, biased towards younger respondents. This did not appear to be true and may be a function of the aging of the Protestant church population.

Secondly, the spiritual yearning of many of the interviewees was surprising. These were not individuals who flitted from faith to faith on a whim. Instead, they were seriously seeking a spiritual home, and many remained in a faith community for years, and even decades. All articulated a spiritual longing, and many communicated a tenaciousness in their search that was inspiring. They kept searching, recognizing that something was still lacking in their spiritual lives.

Finally, I was surprised by the compassion that I felt, especially for the women with whom I spoke by phone. I found myself moved by the stories they told of their spiritual journeys and hoping that they would find a permanent home in Jesus. I felt honored to walk alongside them, even if for only an hour or two.

Recommendations

At this point a number of recommendations can be offered. First of all, catechesis needs to be a part of every Christian church. Catechesis is vitally important, particularly for Christians with New Age and paranormal experiences. Catechesis provides a means to wrestle with the doctrine and tenets of the church and to abandon those beliefs that do

not align with orthodox Christianity. Catechesis is foundational to healthy spiritual growth and spiritual identity. A community without catechesis is an invitation to chaos.

Second, individuals whose identity is less than achieved require help in moving forward in exploration or commitment, as appropriate. This assistance is especially important for those individuals who remain in the searching moratorium identity status. Their attachment to seeking and questioning may make permanent identity commitments challenging.

Third, churches must find a way to welcome others, particularly spiritual seekers. This welcoming must lead to true community, which then becomes the means of both encouraging and supporting spiritual growth. The goal of this growth should be confession of belief followed by conversion of life, as experienced through belonging, believing, and behaving.

Finally, churches must find a way to help people connect with the sacred. Certainly liturgy, especially when expressed through rites and symbols, can do much to encourage this encounter. But churches must find ways to open the door to further encounters with the sacred. For some individuals this relationship can be facilitated through music. For others, opportunities for prayer, particularly open-ended prayer such as soaking prayer, can provide people an opportunity to meet the divine. However this encounter with the sacred is accomplished, individuals need to experience a *resacralization* of their lives and worship.

Areas for Further Study

Based on this research, a number of areas warrant further study. The velcro theory requires more research. One possible area of study would examine which beliefs are most

likely to be velcroed onto an individual's identity. All beliefs are not created equal in this regard. Further study is needed on the circumstances that allow an individual to release a previously velcroed belief or tenet. Under what circumstances is a belief relinquished? Pastors and catechists need to understand how that process can be encouraged and supported.

A second area that is ripe for further research is related to identity statuses. Marcia's construct of identity statuses does not appear to reflect all of the conditions identified within the context of this study adequately. Special attention should be given to the proposed identity status dimensions of commitment, flexibility, and pervasiveness, in addition to the integrated identity status. Further research is needed to validate these dimensions, as well as the four additional statuses beyond Marcia's original model, particularly within the context of spiritual identity.

Postscript

This study has identified answers: not only answers to the research questions posed, but answers in my own life as well. In these answers I find healing.

I have struggled for years to understand a period in my life, shortly after college, when I became a member of a New Age cult. I am pleased to admit that I was not a particularly successful cult member and left after only a few years. Shortly after leaving I found an Episcopal Church in my neighborhood that welcomed me warmly. I have been a Christian ever since.

Over the years I have struggled to understand how I could have been so gullible. I have wondered how I was able to hold those beliefs. I have wrestled with why the cult

was so attractive, and with how I could let myself be drawn into it. This research has answered some of those questions.

I was raised in the church, but much was lacking in my training and formation as a teen. My youth group was a Transactional Analysis group, and we rarely, if ever, cracked open a Bible. Prayer was, at best, an acknowledgement of human need but with little expectation of supernatural intervention. The community was caring, and their caring and forgiveness would one day draw me back to the church, but little of the sacred was apparent.

I left for college as a functionally illiterate Christian. I had little knowledge of Bible, and even less of Christian doctrine. Lacking scriptural knowledge and Christian experience I could not even know what was missing.

In college I was introduced to a variety of New Age groups. They filled a longing for the sacred that I did not even recognize at the time. The cult combined that longing with a ready-made community. Several years would pass before I would realize the falseness of New Age groups, and the cult in particular.

Looking back at those times through the lens of this study, I now recognize how vulnerable I was:

- I had no catechesis in the Christian faith;
- I had little experience of the sacred;
- I had no training in discernment; and,
- I had an ongoing but mostly unfulfilled need for community.

I was living, to use Molnar's words, in a "spiritual vacuum" and I turned to "pagan religions and the occult" (164). My experience makes sense now.

Especially now, as I complete this research, I can see the movement of the Holy Spirit throughout. I see the Holy Spirit's wooing in my longing for the sacred—a longing that I could not even have put words to had I tried. I see the Holy Spirit working in experiences that at the time made little sense but now make perfect sense as they prodded, guided, and informed this research. I see the Holy Spirit moving in the lives of the women who so willingly and courageously shared the stories of their lives as part of this study. I see the Holy Spirit guiding the insights gained through this research.

I pray that the conclusions reached in this study will have an impact on both Christian catechesis and spiritual formation, especially within the Episcopal Church. My hope is that God will continue to use me in that process. I give great thanks to God who prodded me to this research in the first place and guided and protected me throughout.

APPENDIX A

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

I am a doctoral student researching the connection between faith and culture, and the impact that both faith and culture have upon spiritual identity. As part of this research, I am surveying the beliefs of church members across the United States, including [CHURCH NAME]. If you are willing to participate in this survey, please follow the link below.

Participation is optional and will help pastors and church leaders to gain a better understanding of spiritual identities and beliefs, especially at the intersection of faith and culture. The information gathered in this survey will enable pastors to minister more effectively to both members of your congregation as well as to the community at large, including outreach to individuals outside the walls of your church.

Your participation is anonymous unless you choose otherwise. By participating you are helping to provide a richer and deeper understanding of spiritual identity and beliefs. Your assistance in gathering this information is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time and assistance.

<URL>

Sincerely,

Grace La Torra

APPENDIX B

SURVEY INFORMED CONSENT

I am a Doctor of Ministry candidate at Asbury Theological Seminary in Kentucky. I am conducting research on the connection between faith and culture, looking at the relationship of beliefs and spiritual identity.

Because personal beliefs can be a sensitive issue, I want to assure you that all responses will be kept confidential. All of the survey data will be collated to give a blended view and not identify any single person.

A better understanding of spiritual identity, particularly in regard to one's beliefs in the midst of the surrounding culture, will allow churches and pastors to serve individuals more effectively both inside and outside of the church. My hope is that churches from around the country will be helped because you and others like you have taken the time to participate.

Please know that you can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions on the survey. I realize that your participation is voluntary, and I appreciate your willingness to consider being part of the study. Feel free to write me at any time if you need more information. My e-mail address is grace.latorra@asburyseminary.edu.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,
Grace La Torra

By clicking on "I agree to participate" below you are indicating your willingness to continue with this survey.

APPENDIX C

DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

I am

Female
Male

My age is

17 or younger
18-20
21-30
31-40
41-50
51-60
61-70
71-80
81+

I have completed:

Some elementary and/or high school
High School or equivalent (GED)
Some college
4-year college degree (Bachelor)
Graduate degree

I live in:

{state list}

I have lived in {state} for

0-10 years
10-20 years
20+ years

I am

Single
Married
Separated/Divorced
Widowed

I am a Christian

Yes
No

{If yes} I have been a Christian

Less than 1 year
1-2 years
3-5 years
6-10 years
11-20 years
21-30 years
30+ years
My whole life

{If yes} I consider myself a(n):

Episcopalian
Baptist
Lutheran
Methodist
Presbyterian
Other:

{If yes}I consider myself to be an evangelical or "born again" Christian

Yes
No

{If married} My spouse is a Christian

Yes
No

{If yes to Christian spouse} My spouse is an evangelical or "born again"

Christian

Yes
No

{If no to Christian spouse} My spouse is

Jewish
Muslim
Buddhist
Hindu
Atheist
Agnostic
Nothing in particular
Other:

{If yes} I have been a member of the {denomination} church for

0-10 years
10-20 years
20+ years

{If yes} I have attended my present church for

0-10 years
10-20 years
20+ years

{If yes}I usually attend church

More than once a week
Once a week
Once a month
Once every few months
Once or twice a year
Less than once a year
Never

My spiritual life regularly includes (choose as many as apply)

Bible study
Worship
Prayer
Service
Leadership (Sunday school teacher, small group leader, etc.)
Tithing
Outreach
Other:

I would be willing to participate in a one-on-one, hour-long interview.

Yes
No

(If yes) I would prefer to be interviewed by

Mail
E-mail
Phone

(If yes) Your name:

(If yes and phone) Your phone number:

(If yes and phone) What is the best time to reach you?

(If yes and mail) What is your mailing address:

(If yes and mail) City

(If yes and mail) State

(If yes and mail) Zip

(If yes and e-mail) E-mail address:

(If yes and e-mail) Reenter e-mail address:

APPENDIX D

SHORT CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY SCALE

The next few pages include a number of statements related to specific religious beliefs and social behaviors. The statements will be displayed in a random order. You will probably find that you *agree* with some of the statements, and *disagree* with others, to varying extents. Please mark your opinion according to the amount of your agreement or disagreement.

Jesus Christ was the divine Son of God.

Strongly disagree
Moderately disagree
Slightly disagree
Neutral
Slightly agree
Moderately agree
Strongly agree

Please tell me a little bit about why you believe this and/or how you practice this.

The Bible may be an important book of moral teachings, but it was no more inspired by God than were many other such books in human history.

Strongly disagree
Moderately disagree
Slightly disagree
Neutral
Slightly agree
Moderately agree
Strongly agree

Please tell me a little bit about why you believe this and/or how you practice this.

The concept of God is an old superstition that is no longer needed to explain things in the modern era.

Strongly disagree
Moderately disagree
Slightly disagree
Neutral
Slightly agree
Moderately agree
Strongly agree

Please tell me a little bit about why you believe this and/or how you practice this.

Through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God provided a way for forgiveness of people's sins.

Strongly disagree
Moderately disagree
Slightly disagree
Neutral
Slightly agree
Moderately agree
Strongly agree

Please tell me a little bit about why you believe this and/or how you practice this.

Despite what many people believe, there is no such thing as a God who is aware of our actions.

Strongly disagree
Moderately disagree
Slightly disagree
Neutral
Slightly agree
Moderately agree
Strongly agree

Please tell me a little bit about why you believe this and/or how you practice this.

Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried but on the third day He arose from the dead.

Strongly disagree
Moderately disagree
Slightly disagree
Neutral
Slightly agree
Moderately agree
Strongly agree

Please tell me a little bit about why you believe this and/or how you practice this.

God exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Strongly disagree
Moderately disagree
Slightly disagree
Neutral
Slightly agree
Moderately agree
Strongly agree

Please tell me a little bit about why you believe this and/or how you practice this.

APPENDIX E

PAGAN BELIEFS SCALE

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each item. There are no right or wrong answers. This is a sample of your own beliefs and attitudes. Thank you.

I believe in reincarnation, that people will be reborn in this world again and again.

Yes
No

{If yes} Please tell me a little bit about why you believe this and/or how you practice this.

I believe in spiritual energy located in physical things, such as mountains, trees, or crystals.

Yes
No

{If yes} Please tell me a little bit about why you believe this and/or how you practice this.

I believe in yoga, not just as exercise, but as a spiritual practice.

Yes
No

{If yes} Please tell me a little bit about why you believe this and/or how you practice this.

I believe in the "evil eye" or that certain people can cast curses or spells that cause bad things to happen to someone.

Yes
No

{If yes} Please tell me a little bit about why you believe this and/or how you practice this.

I believe in astrology or that the position of the stars and planets can affect people's lives.

Yes
No

{If yes} Please tell me a little bit about why you believe this and/or how you practice this.

I believe tarot cards or a Ouija board can reveal hidden information about the past, the present, or future.

Yes
No

{If yes} Please tell me a little bit about why you believe this and/or how you practice this.

Have you ever felt that you were in touch with someone who has already died?

Yes
No

{If yes} Please tell me a little bit about why you believe this and/or how you practice this.

Have you ever consulted a fortune-teller or psychic?

Yes
No

{If yes} Please tell me a little bit about why you believe this and/or how you practice this.

Have you ever seen or been in the presence of a ghost?

Yes
No

{If yes} Please tell me a little bit about why you believe this and/or how you practice this.

APPENDIX F

SOCIAL DESIRABILITY SCALE

1. I sometimes litter.
2. I always admit my mistakes openly and face the potential negative consequences.
3. In traffic I am always polite and considerate of others.
4. I always accept others' opinions, even when they don't agree with my own.
5. I take out my bad moods on others now and then.
6. There has been an occasion when I took advantage of someone else.
7. In conversations I always listen attentively and let others finish their sentences.
8. I never hesitate to help someone in case of emergency.
9. When I have made a promise, I keep it—no ifs, ands, or buts.
10. I occasionally speak badly of others behind their back.
11. I would never live off other people.
12. I always stay friendly and courteous with other people, even when I am stressed out.
13. During arguments I always stay objective and matter-of-fact.
14. There has been at least one occasion when I failed to return an item that I borrowed.
15. I always eat a healthy diet.
16. Sometimes I only help because I expect something in return.

APPENDIX G

PILE SORT TERMS

The following terms were entered into Qualtrics to be used in a pile sort in order to develop a mapping of the respondents' spiritual schemas:

ANGELS
ASTROLOGY
BIBLE
CHURCH
CRYSTALS
DEATH
EVANGELICAL
FAITH
GHOSTS
GOD
GOSPEL
GRACE
HEALING
HEAVEN
HOLY
HOLY SPIRIT
HOPE
HOROSCOPE
HYPNOSIS
INSPIRATIONAL
JESUS
KARMA
LIFE
LORD
LOVE
MAGIC
MEDITATION
MIRACLE
NEW AGE
NUMEROLOGY
PALMISTRY
PARANORMAL
PEACE
PRAISE
PRAYER
PSYCHIC
REINCARNATION
SALVATION
SIN
SPIRIT
SPIRITUALITY
TAROT
TRUTH
WITCHCRAFT
WORSHIP

APPENDIX H

PILE SORT TERMS REMOVED

The following terms were removed from the words generated by Google Sets because they were plurals, similar words, proper nouns, unusual words, positions, or common words.

Allah
animal sacrifice
art
atheism
atheist
beauty
bhanamati
bishop
black magic
Buddhism
catholic
Celtic
Chinese astrology
Christ
Christian
Christianity
creation
culture
dating
debate
evolution
family
gadgets
godmen cult
Hindu
Hinduism
holidays
horoscopes
humor
Islam
Israel
Jesus Christ
Jewish
Judaism
kids
minister
ministry
miracles
Mormon
Muslim
of
paranormal claims
pets
politics
pope
priest
psychics
Quran
recipes
reiki
relationship
relationships
religion
religious
science
sermon
song
spiritual
spiritualism
the
UFO
vastu
vastushastra
work

APPENDIX I

PHONE INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT

[DATE]

Dear [NAME],

I am a Doctor of Ministry candidate at Asbury Theological Seminary. I am conducting research on the connection between faith and culture, looking at the relationship of beliefs and spiritual identity. I am contacting you because you indicated a willingness to participate in a one-on-one interview.

Each interview will last approximately one to two hours and will be recorded. These recordings will be transcribed and all identifying information removed. Since personal beliefs can be a sensitive issue, I want to assure you that your responses will be kept confidential. All of the interview data will be collated to give a blended view rather than identify any one person. Once this research is completed in approximately six months, I will destroy the individual surveys and keep the anonymous data electronically for an indefinite period of time, at least until my dissertation is written and approved.

This interview has no known risks. The questions are open-ended, and designed to help me understand your beliefs and spiritual identity. Please know that you can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions. I realize that your participation is voluntary.

A better understanding of spiritual identity, particularly in regard to one's beliefs in the midst of the surrounding culture, will allow churches and pastors to serve individuals both inside and outside the church more effectively. My hope is that churches from around the country will be helped because you and others like you have taken the time to participate.

I appreciate your willingness to consider being part of the study. Feel free to contact me at any time if you need any more information.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,
Grace La Torra

Do you volunteer to participate in the study described above?

APPENDIX J

SPIRITUAL IDENTITY PROTOCOL

What events and/or people in your life helped define who you are today?

Describe your spiritual beliefs and how you came to them?

Have you ever questioned your beliefs? {If yes, ask for a description}

Have you ever experienced tension or conflict between the beliefs that you hold?

How have you reconciled this tension or conflict?

Which of the beliefs you hold have had a greater impact on who you are now?

Things to look for during the interview:

Role salience and role flexibility

APPENDIX K

MAIL INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT

3229 Risner
Las Cruces, NM 88011
[DATE]

Dear [NAME],

I am a Doctor of Ministry candidate at Asbury Theological Seminary. I am conducting research on the connection between faith and culture, looking at the relationship of beliefs and spiritual identity. I am contacting you because you indicated a willingness to participate in a one-on-one interview.

Each interview will be conducted by mail. Interview questions are included in this package. You may write or type your answers. You are welcome to write as much or as little as you like. Feel free to add more sheets as necessary. Once you have completed the interview questions, please return this consent form along with your responses in the enclosed envelope.

Because personal beliefs can be a sensitive issue, I want to assure you that your responses will be kept confidential. All of the interview data will be collated to give a blended view rather than identify any one person. Once this research is completed in approximately six months, I will destroy the individual surveys and keep the anonymous data electronically for an indefinite period of time, at least until my dissertation is written and approved.

This interview has no known risks. The questions are open-ended and designed to help me understand your beliefs and spiritual identity. Please know that you can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions. I realize that your participation is voluntary.

A better understanding of spiritual identity, particularly in regard to one's beliefs in the midst of the surrounding culture, will allow churches and pastors to serve individuals both inside and outside the church more effectively. My hope is that churches from around the country will be helped because you and others like you have taken the time to participate.

I appreciate your willingness to consider being part of the study. Feel free to write me at any time if you need any more information. You can contact me by mail or by e-mail. My e-mail address is grace.latorra@asburyseminary.edu.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,
Grace La Torra

I volunteer to participate in the study described above and so indicate by my signature below:

Your signature: _____ Date:_____
Please print your name: _____

APPENDIX L

E-MAIL INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT

[DATE]

Dear [NAME],

I am a Doctor of Ministry candidate at Asbury Theological Seminary. I am conducting research on the connection between faith and culture, looking at the relationship of beliefs and spiritual identity. I am contacting you because you indicated a willingness to participate in a one-on-one interview.

Each interview will be conducted by e-mail. Once I have received e-mail containing your informed consent, I will e-mail the first question to you. You can take several days to respond by e-mail. Once I receive your response I will read it. If I have further questions I will send them to you. If not, then I will e-mail you the next interview question. We will complete this process until all the questions have been answered.

Because personal beliefs can be a sensitive issue, I want to assure you that your responses will be kept confidential. All of the interview data will be collated to give a blended view rather than identify any one person. Once this research is completed in approximately six months, I will destroy the individual surveys and keep the anonymous data electronically for an indefinite period of time, at least until my dissertation is written and approved.

This interview has no known risks. The questions are open-ended and designed to help me understand your beliefs and spiritual identity. I have attached a copy of the interview questions with this e-mail. Please know that you can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions. I realize that your participation is voluntary.

A better understanding of spiritual identity, particularly in regard to one's beliefs in the midst of the surrounding culture, will allow churches and pastors to serve individuals both inside and outside the church more effectively. My hope is that churches from around the country will be helped because you and others like you have taken the time to participate.

I appreciate your willingness to consider being part of the study. Feel free to write me at any time if you need any more information. My e-mail address is grace.latorra@asburyseminary.edu.

Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,
Grace La Torra

If you are willing to volunteer to participate in the study described above please reply to this e-mail with the statement "I CONSENT" and your name and date.

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